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It all had a touch of high tragic drama about it. Storms swept Brisbane; Macbeth and King Lear were invoked; and there was much wailing and gnashing of teeth as the tribune of the Moral Right, Rona Joyner, warned of an imminent “wave of immorality” in the wake of the demise of Joh Bjelke-Petersen after 19 years as Premier.

It also had more than a touch of farce as Queensland moved into its interregnum with a premier who was no longer leader and a leader who was not yet premier. The reporters at the press conference held by Mike Ahern and Bill Gunn after the former had been elected leader of the Queensland National Party and the latter his deputy, still seemed to be acting like Joh’s proverbial “chooks” — they were a little hysterical, giggling and shuffling around not knowing quite what to ask and, in the end, resorting to questions to Mrs Ahern about whether she had any ambitions for the Senate and if she could cook pumpkin scones.

The next days had everyone wondering. Had Joh really made such a fundamental error of judgment? Was this really going to be the end or did he have something else up his sleeve? This, we should remember after the state elections last year, would not have been inconceivable and very few political commentators here were prepared to confidently predict that this was definitely the end for Joh. There were rumours, for example, that Joh had been talking to the ALP state secretary Peter Beattie with a view to gaining ALP support on the floor of parliament and thereby forcing an election. That there were some negotiations has since been substantiated although the ALP is wisely — and rather shamefacedly — keeping quiet about their precise content. There were rumours also that Joh would speak to the Queen, and that he would sack the Governor, Sir Walter Campbell, before the Governor sacked him.

When, in the end, Joh did pack his bags and leave the Executive Building for his home at Kingaroy, nicely timed for peak hour national news in those states without daylight saving, it was not without a few barbs being flung here and there — at Mike Ahern, at state president Sir Robert Sparkes, at the disloyal members of the Cabinet and, finally, at the whole organisation and leadership of the National Party — Joh claiming that this last was a party he no longer wanted to lead.

It was not a good year for Joh. Ever since the push on Canberra and its attendant humiliation both for him and for the federal National MPs who lost their seats, Joh seems to have stumbled from one error and backdown to another. The proposed ICI chlorine plant at the Brisbane bayside suburb of Lytton, which had the former premier’s full support, was the subject of a highly successful community campaign which persuaded ICI to scrap their plans in order to save face for Joh. Then there was his support for a private hospital at Southport on the Gold Coast, to be built by his old mate Sir Edward Lyons. He was forced, by moves in Cabinet initiated by Mike Ahern, to back down on this one too. To cap it all, Joh lost his voice during the state conference of the Nationals at Townsville and, from his home, had to watch as his party voted in significant policy changes — on condom vending machines, for example — in his absence and against his wishes. But possibly the most decisive act in Joh’s fall was the setting up, by deputy premier Bill Gunn, of the Fitzgerald Commission of Inquiry into police corruption.

And now that he has gone these policy changes are accelerating. Mike Ahern has announced the probability of a Public Accounts Committee, the very issue on which Joh withdrew his Nationals from coalition with the Liberals and brought his party to power in its own right in 1983. Another pet project of the former premier — the world’s tallest building — will not now go ahead. Changes to the structure of the education system initiated by Lin Powell, one of Joh’s strongest supporters in the former Cabinet, have now been shelved (along with their initiator) and are unlikely to be implemented. Sex education will now go ahead in Queensland schools; condom vending machines will be replaced in those university toilet blocks from which they were wrenched early one morning by the state police; and the “Black Hole” detention cells at Brisbane’s Boggo Road Jail are now likely to be closed following a visit by Justice Marcus Einfeld and Brian Burdekin, respectively President and
Commissioner of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission—both of whom were previously refused access by Sir Joh.

The new Premier, Mike Ahern, has announced new portfolios in Finance and in Communications and Technology. Brian Austin, former Liberal and 1983 "defector" will take the finance portfolio and will also be charged with the development of a new economic strategy for a state which, by all the pertinent financial indicators, is way behind the rest of Australia other than in the fields of property development and tourism. Ahern has also promised more open government with stricter observance of due parliamentary procedure. Not on the cards, however, is any change to the electoral malapportionment—the famous "Bjelke-mander"—which gives some rural voters up to two and a half times the electoral clout of urban voters. The Nationals' position may, however, be weakened if Ahern and the "new image" which he is projecting for the National Party are unable to retain the loyalty of the rural vote in the way that Joh was able to do so effectively. On this we will have to wait and see.

The Left and progressive movements up here might be forgiven for thinking that they are entering an era of new possibilities: our own little transition from feudalism to capitalism, from Absolutism to Enlightenment. The problem is, however, that this transition is taking place independently of any strategic input from the ALP, itself riven by factional disputes and characterised by opportunist alliances trying to convince everyone that the problem is one of leadership! Responses to the Joh crisis and to the Ahern government have been singularly inept to date.

It is fair to say, though, that the Left is faced with a bit of a problem. If Ahern does fulfil his promises for a revitalised economic strategy, more open government and more equitable social and welfare policies, then it is possible that the Nationals will find a new lease of life and, failing any modifications to the zonal voting system, the ALP is not likely—on current form and even with a new leader (probably Wayne Goss)—to be any better placed at the next state election than it was at the last. On the other hand, however, it is possible that Ahern's proposals for public accountability will open up so many cracks in the power base of the National Party and its system of cronyism that it will enter a severe crisis and be unable to govern effectively on its own.

This is, no doubt, part of the reason for the new premier keeping one eye very firmly on the proceedings of the Fitzgerald Inquiry. Two long-serving ministers, Russ Hinze and Don Lane, have been excluded from the present Cabinet because they have been named in hearsay evidence to the inquiry. Ahern's immediate response to his sacking by Sir Joh was to drop a very large and public hint that he had material relevant to the inquiry which he could not specify because of the laws of defamation. The new Premier is clearly moving quickly to distance himself and his Cabinet from whatever the inquiry might turn up.

Rumours at the time Ahern was sacked were that Jack "The Bagman" Herbert, a key figure in high level corruption, was talking his head off to Inquiry officers somewhere in northern NSW, and that Sir Edward Lyons was likely to be subpoenaed to appear before Commissioner Fitzgerald. Nothing further has happened on this front but the big question is whether or not Ahern and his new Cabinet will be able either to get far enough away from the fall-out if anything big does blow up at the inquiry, or to give the new administration sufficient substance to withstand the effects.

In any event, it is clear that the Fitzgerald Inquiry remains the one big shadow over Ahern's and the National Party's bright new future. In this context, too, it is imperative for the ALP and the left in general, at the very least, to keep the new Premier on his toes and to his word, to recognize that cracks and contradictions in the Queensland National monolith are opening up (especially with its law and order ethos in a shambles), and that a strategic response is called for.

Colin Mercer
The NFF Doesn’t Rule, OK?

It came as something of a surprise to this author when, towards the end of last year, the Deputy Director of the Australian Wheat Board, Mr. Michael Shanahan, told farmers to “get down on their knees” and beg the government for assistance. This advice goes against the grain — if you’ll excuse the pun — of current economic wisdom and represents a direct challenge to the policies of the National Farmers’ Federation (NFF). The NFF’s line on subsidisation is unambiguous and uncompromising. The way to create a lean, productive and internationally competitive agriculture is for Australian farmers to become more efficient and to abandon their traditional demands for state intervention in agriculture. Efficiency can only be achieved, it is asserted, if farmers are progressively exposed to free-market forces. Government actions both at home and abroad are viewed negatively — as distorting price signals and creating barriers to international trade.

During the post-war years of Liberal National (Country) Party rule Australian farmers were afforded protection and encouragement under an umbrella of price support and subsidy schemes. The level of protection varied across rural industries but stood at around twenty-eight percent, about the same as that provided to manufacturing industry. The Whitlam and Fraser administrations, with different fiscal priorities and aware of agriculture’s declining relative importance in the Australian economy, sought to alter the balance. By 1980, the effective rate of assistance to agriculture had declined to eight percent (with that for manufacturing industry hovering at its previous level). Today it stands at just under five percent. Australian agriculture presently receives the lowest level of government support of all OECD countries.

According to the NFF, Australian governments have acted correctly in removing the various distortions (including subsidies) from Australian industry. The NFF is currently advocating even greater levels of deregulation for both manufacturing and agricultural industries. It believes that since Australia has taken a responsible lead in abolishing subsidies and implementing free trade agreements, such economic “righteousness” allows us to argue from a position of strength at GATT meetings and at Brussels for the world-wide removal of import restrictions and for the elimination of price supports. The NFF contends that if free-market forces prevail in the world economy, Australian farmers will be among the beneficiaries.
There is a certain degree of truth in this argument. It has been estimated, for example, that the Common Agricultural Policy of the EEC has reduced world commodity prices by about sixteen percent and is currently costing Australian producers something in the order of one billion dollars per annum. Yet subsidy support for farmers in the EEC continues to grow at a level of approximately four times the rate of increase in agricultural production. The situation in the US is no better. President Reagan's recent assertion that the US would act to dismantle all barriers to agricultural trade and phase out subsidies over the next ten years, contrasts poorly with his signature on the 1985 Farm Bill. The US government has guaranteed producers a high level of income support and has agreed to underwrite export prices into the 1990s.

The Bill was enacted in an effort to protect domestic producers from overseas competition and to recapture traditional export markets which were lost as the US dollar appreciated during the early years of the 1980s. Just as in the EEC, farmers in the US have responded to the government's latest policies by expanding output, placing even more pressure on the government to assist the farmers to conquer world markets. For this reason the Reagan Administration has sought to undercut the EEC (and other producer nations like Australia) through its subsidy schemes. Sugar policy in the US is but one example of how the state intention of deregulation appears to sit uncomfortably with the realities of intervention. Support for US sugar producers is currently costing US taxpayers about three billion dollars per annum. Our access to the lucrative US market has declined accordingly. US policy has lowered world prices by about nine percent and has increased the price instability of traded sugar on world markets. Under existing legislation the US will turn from a net importer to a net exporter of sugar by 1990, leading to further deterioration in world prices and increased pressure on Australia's already-ravaged cane producers to leave the industry. US sugar policy is costing Australian producers something like two hundred million dollars in an average year.

While the urgency of reform in agricultural trade is obvious, it is highly unlikely the current trade war between agricultural exporting nations will be settled overnight. There will probably not even be a negotiated truce. The US wants to reestablish its previously dominant role in international agriculture; the EEC wants to keep its newly-found markets for its lamb, cheese and grain; and countries like Australia and New Zealand want to become the food bowl of the Pacific Basin (which includes the profitable US and Japanese markets). None of these countries is willing to lose ground to its competitors.

So where does Australia stand? We want to expand our agricultural output and increase our sales abroad while abstaining from any reversion to heavy price support. Our new task is to send delegations abroad to argue against protectionism. Prime Minister Hawke received a cool reception during his visits to Brussels in 1985 and 1986. John Dawkins adopted an uncharacteristically deferential style in his Washington negotiations last year. But he, too, returned with little success. While Australia may adopt a position of moral superiority in proclaiming the virtues of free trade, the economic and political realities of life in the US and EEC countries are such that our protestations are given little consideration in international negotiations. There are good reasons why our competitors show insensitivity over protection. Most of the benefits of earlier rounds of subsidies and benefits have been capitalised into land values and other assets. Moves to dismantle protection abroad would result in reduced output and would cause massive welfare problems. Neither outcome is tenable in the face of powerful and volatile farmer opposition in those countries. Australia is a relatively small player on the world stage and we are unlikely to influence policies of the major traders. Yet, in being intimately bound to the fate of world agriculture, we are the country most likely to be hurt by continued trade restrictions.

If we can't make a dint in the armoury of international protectionism, what can we do? Much of the focus of the Labor government (as is evidenced by Kerin's dairy plan and the Hawke government's eighteen percent real expenditure cut for rural industry in last year's budget) is upon streamlining agriculture and removing the small producers from farming. The NFF (and most agricultural economists) are in broad agreement with this "efficiency" thrust. In fact, although the Nationals have been one of the most vocal political proponents of the state underwriting of agriculture, they are unlikely, in any future Coalition government, to push the Liberals away from their dry anti-interventionist stance. Monetarism rules, OK?

It is therefore no wonder that rural producers are beginning to show some degree of frustration. The recent establishment of the Union of Australian Farmers, an organisation aimed at preventing the further deterioration of Australian agriculture, is an indication of the impatience of farmers with the free market solutions to the ills of Australian rural industry. Farmers have come to recognise that the policies of the NFF actually endorse the removal of government monies from agriculture at the very time our international competitors are being cocooned by increased protection and subsidisation. Some Australian farmers obviously consider that they have been backed into a corner by the NFF — unable, on the one hand, to do much to alter the decline in international commodity prices yet incapable, on the other, of asking for support from their own government.

The problem for those in rural Australia who would seek to secure greater government support for agriculture is that such assistance represents a major cost to the community at a time of budgetary restraint. My guess is that we will see
a great deal more farmer protest, including an erosion in support for the NFF, over the next few years. In the meantime, farmers can always apply for rural adjustment funds to help them to "get big" or "get out" of agriculture. For better or worse these are probably the only orthodox individual options for farmers, whose fate is bound up with an unplanned, volatile and oversupplied world market in agricultural commodities.

Geoil Lawrence

Kentucky Fried Socialism

The Thirteenth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, which closed in November last, was a victory for the economic and political reformists who have, on the whole, been on the ascendant in China since the late 1970s. This means that the pace of opening to the outside world, including the West, Japan and the socialist countries of eastern Europe, is likely to accelerate. The private sector of the economy will increase from its current very low level. The trend towards decentralization of the economy evident over the last few years will continue and gather momentum.

The distinction between the leadership role of the Party and the management of government at all levels will become much clearer. This means that Party officials will exercise slighter control over particular decisions taken within organizations or at grass-roots level, but they will continue to control overall policy.

The secretary-general of the Party appointed by the Congress is 67-year-old Zhao Ziyang, who also occupies the position of Premier of the State Council, equivalent to Prime Minister. Zhao has been acting secretary-general since January 1987, when Hu Yaobang was dismissed for incompetence following a series of student demonstrations the previous December.

The most influential man in China before the Congress was Deng Xiaoping. He did not stand for election to the Politburo, but remains the Chairman of the Party Central Committee's Military Commission. This position ensures his continuing influence in Chinese affairs. It has for a while been clear also that he wanted Zhao Ziyang as secretary-general.

Deng Ziaoping is 83. By retiring from the Politburo, he has been able to take with him, with minimum loss of face on all sides, a great many of the older generation of leaders, including some much less enthusiastic about the speed of economic and political reform than he.

Of the new Central Committee of 175 people, 43, or about 25 per cent, have been elected to it for the first time. Of the members of the previous Central Committee, 98 have been omitted, including most of the old generation of revolutionaries, now very old men. Although most withdrew voluntarily, a few nominated but failed to be elected. These include Deng Liqun, one of the ideological leaders of the "struggle against bourgeois liberalization" which began in January 1987.

Zhao Ziyang paid lip service to the continuation of this struggle, but in reality its influence has been very slight since about May last year, and most people will forget about it now that the Thirteenth Congress has ensured a victory for reform.

Among the members of the Central Committee, seventeen form the Politburo, of whom seven are new. Among the 25 Politburo members elected from the Twelfth Congress in September 1982, one was a woman, but there are no women this time. The average age of the newcomers from the Thirteenth Congress is 62, five less than that of the ten continuing members, and they are mainly technocrats. There is still some military representation - one of the newcomers is Qin Jiwei, Commander of the Beijing military region - but it is much weaker than in the old Politburo.

Among the continuing Politburo members is Hu Yaobang. The retention of a sacked political leader at such a high level suggests a change in the CCP's management style. When Hua Guofeng was dismissed as Party head in mid - 1981, he was dropped from the Politburo at the time of the succeeding Twelfth Congress.

The most powerful group in China is the Standing Committee of the Politburo, which has five members. Other than Zhao Ziyang, the most powerful man in the new Committee is Li Peng, an engineer trained in the Soviet Union who knows Russian and has handled relations with the East European countries in recent years. It is quite likely that he will succeed Zhao Ziyang as Premier of the State Council.

Li Peng's rise has clear implications for China's relations with Eastern Europe in general, and the Soviet Union in particular. Since 1982 there has been a trend in favour of better relations, which has gathered momentum since Gorbachev came to power in 1985. While there are still political "obstacles" in the way of improving Sino-Soviet relations, trade and socio-cultural relations between the two countries have burgeoned. The "obstacles" do...
not apply to relations with East European countries other than the Soviet Union.

The whole tone of the Congress points towards enthusiasm for the sort of openness to the capitalist world which has characterized China in the last few years. Joint ventures will continue and expand. At almost exactly the same time as the Congress, China's first Kentucky Fried Chicken establishment opened for business in the centre of Beijing, so that while Chairman Mao's portrait still eyes the central Tiananmen Square from one side, that of Colonel Sanders does so from another.

Although relations with both the United States and Japan have deteriorated recently over Tibet and other matters, the Chinese are likely to continue wooing economic involvement from them as actively as they can. Relations with other capitalist countries, such as Australia, have been excellent over the past few years, and the policies and leadership which have emerged from the Congress point towards still further improvement in the near future.

In theoretical terms, the most significant idea to result from the Congress was that China is now in the primary stage of socialism. Zhao Ziyang said in his Report to the Congress that China has been in this primary stage since 1949, when the Party came to power, and would need to undergo socialist modernisation before moving to the secondary stage. This process would take at least a century, meaning that the primary stage will not end until about 2050. Elements of private enterprise will persist in China and even grow until that time, and inequalities will widen.

In 1986, 70 per cent of total industrial output was from state-owned enterprises, 28 per cent from those owned collectively, and only 2 per cent from the private. However, these figures may change quite sharply in the coming years. A report in the Far Eastern Economic Review in November quoted Zhao Ziyang himself as telling Gatt representatives that the sector under direct state control would account for only 30 per cent of the economy within two to three years. The Congress has committed the Party to reduce the economy's planned sector.

The idea that ownership and management are separate is not new to the Thirteenth Congress. However, it did receive special emphasis in Zhao's Report to the Congress, and may be implemented more extensively from now on. It means that land or factories can be owned by the state but managed by individuals or collectives. It is likely that the right to lease land will become a feature of Chinese rural life in the near future. Economic development zones open to foreign investment are to be developed further, including the lease of land to foreigners for up to 50 years.

Zhao also told the Congress that although distribution according to work would remain the dominant form of income among the people, other forms would become permissible. These will include interest earned from the buying of bonds and dividends from shares.

The Chinese continue to deny vociferously that these trends will make China capitalist. After all, there is nothing anti-socialist or anti-Marxist about being rich. The “primary stage of socialism” can include elements of private enterprise, and the wider inequalities ought only to be temporary. But it will be interesting for those alive in 2050 to see if China's leaders then declare it ready to enter the “secondary stage”.

Colin Mackerras
Profile

Madonna

I see the movie, I listen to the records, I buy the book, I study the signs. They point in opposite directions simultaneously. “From when I was very young, I knew that being a girl and being charming in a feminine sort of way could get me a lot of things, and I milked it for everything I could.” And at the same time: “I wanted to do everything everybody told me I couldn’t ever do.” And that’s just what she has done. It is alter ego at work, to millions it has proved irresistible. It is one of the keys to Madonna.

Born to strict Catholic Italian immigrant parents (who else would have thought up that name — along with the additional Louise Veronica Ciccone) Madonna was brought up in Detroit with three brothers, four sisters and a classic and urgent desire to make good.

She is a good girl. Her mother died when she was eight, her childhood was spent taking care of the little ones. Now, she is taking care of herself: mother dear — this girl just wants to have fun, as she might have sung to millions of teeny ears of Cyndi Lauper hadn’t done it first. Not that the two, despite certain similarities, are inter-changeable. Many, including Lauper herself, felt that of the two, it was Cyndi who was the more likely candidate for pop stardom. On the other hand, Madonna is the all round enhanced media personality: she sings (pretty well), but was also pushing it as an actress, dancer and anything else likely to bring the heights within her grasp, for years prior to her “overnight success”.

When Susan Seidelman cast the New York based, and rather interesting, cult figure as the desperately sought after Susan, she could have had no real sense that she was hitching her film to a rising tidal wave.

But Madonna is a smart cookie, she knew what she was about and all along she was aiming at the iconsphere. And she was no ordinary pop chick merely walking through a movie. Susan was a neatly constructed and assured persona (and at least her third movie appearance, although she doesn’t talk about the others). Susan was also immediately and stunningly beguiling. It didn’t stop the putative star of the piece, Rosanna Arquette, being just a little pissed off. On the other hand, it did mean that Rosanna was in an unpredictably huge general release smash instead of the star of a marginal arthouse hit.

But was Madonna really the Susan of that film? Was Susan really Madonna? Who cared? Certainly not the millions of 15 year old WannabeMadonnas. They gave their mothers hysteries as they got themselves up like Times Square tartlets, with sludgy luscious lipstick, charcoaled eyes, massed streaked hair and the clothes — aaaagh god! The clothes.

Susan/Madonna put on the style in great dollops — it was Maybelline and Fabulash country, brand names not spoken in polite society since the equally over-made-up 60s. But in many ways the early ‘80s were a lot spunkier than the ’60s ever were: “Get into the groove,” went her hit single from the film, “you gotta move boy, if you want my love”. Quite what she had in mind is open to several interpretations, at least one of them is threatening to the male: posters for the movie were amended to “Madogga — slag — cunt — tart” by boys who ran away laughing nervously.

Between the ‘60s and this decade there has been women’s liberation — dreaded, of course, ridiculed but subliminally sunk into everyday life. A dangerous substance, ingested by osmosis, secretly and continually popping up in unexpected places. Once upon a time there was Patti Smith and Debbie Harry when she was Blondie — Madonna’s older sisters in the image business. Patti strutted the stuff of independence, actress Debbie created the look, they set the tone of their times. Madonna did the same for the early ‘80s, but she brought the two facets together.

That difference is yet another key. One that might hang jangling around her neck along with the rosaries and crucifixes of the good Catholic girl bent on subversion. Who literally obeys her daddy — on state on a US tour which sold over 650,000 tickets — and who has married, but said “I can’t conceive of living happily ever after for a long period of time with one person” even before Sean Penn came along to prove the wisdom of such a statement.

Nevertheless, having committed the conventional she can still observe of the criticism of her stage show and stage personal: “Art and
music can never be too permissive, especially if they act as an alternative to the reactionary attitudes of people like Reagan and the Moral Majority."

Definitely Madonna — not the Magdalene — despite the studied sleaze and unabashed sweat of strenuous physical performance, there is nothing really dubious here. There is wholesome flesh on her bones, not the sinewy stringout twitch of Patti nor the smallhours pallor of Debbie, nor the anorexic "slimness" of the fundamentally unsure. Despite what she does with that microphone, nothing nasty has passed those pouting lips. Noxious substances haven’t take their toll of the highly energised and sensuously proportioned frame: this is a pasta and popcorn girl. And that reveals yet another key: despite contradictory images, Madonna is no Lolita. Soft porn it verges on, kiddy porn it ain’t. Perm any one of three preferred birth dates (57, 58 or 59) and she is a canny, clear headed young woman — boychild husband notwithstanding.

Her own hands were firmly on the wheel of Madonna Inc. She was responsible for the monster tours, the merchandising and the designer boutiques that went with the first wave of Madonna mania. And that is the penultimate key: comparisons with Marilyn Monroe and Goldie Hawn are more accurate than many realise. Madonna is as clever and talented as both, as conscious of the power and origin of the fluffy, kooky, muddlehead image as the former, and as in control of it as the latter. And she plays the contradictions for all they’re worth.

She gets herself up like she escaped from a circus or bordello and she is nonchalantly unconcerned. Yet she never actually got to drink the triple Tequila Sunrise she ordered in Desperately Seeking Susan and she didn’t actually engage in unpleasant, unlawful or unkind activities — it was hearsay, people

only said she did! The perverted bridal outfit she wore for her stage encore has to be the living end and a tired business person’s fantasy but when it comes to it, she has clean, neat finger nails, perfect skin and she shaves her armpits to the smoothness of a baby’s bottom. To date, and in circular fashion, she’s done everything people said she couldn’t. She’s done a lot of things people said she shouldn’t. And she’s also milked being charming, young and feminine in a way that Massalina and Mata Hari would have understood.

Success has brought the luxury of failed movies, bopped photographers, more hit records and a gradual dilution of that first exciting image leap into the public eye. That perhaps is the final key to anyone who is still, and in any way, seeking Madonna.

Diana Simmonds
AUSTRALIAN LEFT REVIEW

FACING THE FUTURE
Union Strategy Reconstructed

Geoff Dow

Australia Reconstructed was met variously with hostility, indifference and acclaim. But, argues Geoff Dow, it could still represent a turning point for the unions — and for Australia.

I t is now clearer than ever that the trade union movement rather than the government, economists, public servants, academics, employer groups or the corporate controllers of investment, has become the bearer of the public interest in Australia.

The ACTU-Trade Development Commission document Australia Reconstructed is radical not in conventional terms but because it signals a struggle to dramatically change the auspices under which macroeconomic decision making is conducted. For the past three years, the government has been pursuing a strategy, in defiance of the 1983 Accord, to ‘restructure’ our economy by slotting it in to global trends without making commensurate efforts to develop internal mechanisms and institutions which actually allow us to direct investment, choose an industrial structure or plan the location, level or content of economic activity. The current purpose is to expose people and industries to international competition — as if this will inevitably produce a cleansing fire of regenerated, export-oriented, entrepreneurial success. Such strategies will not produce full employment; they have not done so in any other time or place. Market processes will work, if that is the word for it, only insofar as they permanantly impoverish large sections of the population; while creating enclaves of nervous beneficiaries in a global network of divided populations.

For those who don’t wish to repeat the British experience of unnecessary suffering, industrial devastation and ‘two-nation’ dissent continually fuelled by racism, labour market segmentation and civil suspicion, the alternatives for industrial renewal prefigured in the report deserve careful study. But it won’t be easy to establish these ‘alternative accumulation strategies’ on the political agenda; there are enormous battles ahead — with the left as well as with the right. We need therefore to review carefully the implications of union driven proposals for the regeneration of Australian capitalism.

Much of the time of the study group whose conclusions led to Australia Reconstructed was spent in Sweden, whose social and economic experience is widely misunderstood by those anxious to dismiss, on a priori grounds, its relevance to the rest of the world. The swedish model is in fact a widely respected approach to economic policy making rooted quite firmly in the key nesian and post keynesian analytical traditions. It acknowledges, with Keynes and Joan Robin-son, that market mechanisms do not produce stability or optimality or full employment; that public control of investment is necessary to deal with inherent cyclical deficiencies; that real wage reductions both exacerbate recession and further skew income distribution in directions that make recovery less likely; and that permanent incomes policy arrangements are the only practicable means to overcome the 1980s problem of inflation during recession.

Through editorials and feature articles, much of the financial press has been advocating policies identical to those Joan Robinson once said produced ‘monstrously stupid, unnecessary misery’ in the 1980s. Even Keynes himself described deflationary policies as sadistic. Yet economic orthodoxy, oblivious to the specific features of actual economies, continues to derive policies from abstracted theories, models and conceptions of equilibrium. There is no economy on earth that is adequately described by these models; and policies drawn from them are as predictable as they are damaging. If one has a view of price mechanism which set up tendencies to social optimality and a presupposition that all economic problems are problems of resource allocation, then there is a simple, prepackaged solution to every economic problem: reduce
What's in it for Women?

Given the current economic climate, it is perhaps not surprising that most public discussion of Australia Reconstructed has focused on considerations of growth and the current account deficit. Less has been said about the aspect of most concern to women — namely "equity". However, as the report notes, in several of the mission countries — and most notably in Sweden — growth and equity are seen as integrated and complementary.

This is evident in terms of both wages and labour market policy. "Wage Solidarity" policies (the most egalitarian of which is Sweden's) combine considerations of equity and efficiency:

The principle of equal pay for work of equal value is enshrined in the system and is used to protect low-paid workers, to prevent inefficient firms from being subsidised by low wages and to help prevent artificial labour market segmentation.

Australia still has a long way to go in eradicating labour market segmentation and particularly in implementing the "equal pay for work of equal value" concept. In 1981 the average female earnings in Sweden amounted to 80 percent of average male earnings, which compares favourably with the 1983 Australian figure of 66 percent. This is generally attributed to the Swedish "wages solidarity" policy.

Hence the report recommends that centralised wage-fixing should give priority to extending the principle of "equal pay for work of equal value", particularly the way in which it extends to women.

In regard to labour market policy, the mission found that in Sweden, Norway and Austria equality of opportunity is perceived not only as a worthwhile social objective in its own right, but as an essential wages and reduce government spending.

In the 1930s, wage reductions were imposed on already suffering populations in a search for the benefits of market flexibility. They proved to be 'cures' worse than the disease. In the 1970s, with equally smug assurance, the economists insisted that government spending was the cause of inflation. The resulting policies of public sector restraint again exacerbated the recession. In the 1980s, the cause celebre for small government champions is the so called public sector borrowing requirement (PSBR), a constructed figure of far less importance than the uses to which borrowed funds are put. The contemporary case against the public sector, an exercise of unparalleled evanescence given its puny size and the scope of its underdevelopment, relies on a dishonest equation of foreign debt with government obligations. Our overseas debt is not by any objective evaluation a significant public problem because most of it is private debt and readily repayable from private revenues generated both here and overseas. Foreign money markets react to policies they don't like by urging policies which are substantively irrational and which consciously undermine national productive capacities. As Winton Higgins has been arguing, we need a politicised and political unionism to short-circuit this whole self-perpetuating cycle.

The commitment to the principles and policy prescriptions of economic liberalism continues to determine the government's priorities and continues to create a gap between what we are and what we might be. This is not as new a development as some of the current disillusionment with the Labor Party would suggest. Political parties of labour here and elsewhere have a rather squalid record in responding to economic recession by deploying policies that make things worse. Ramsay Macdonald, James Scullin, James Calaghan and Gough Whitlam all preceded Bob Hawke as labour leaders who reacted inappropriately to unexpected economic downturn.

But Treasury economists with their manic distrust of planning, intervention and the creation of new economic policy institutions, have had a stranglehold on economic policy in most Anglo-saxon countries for as long as we can remember. Economic historian Sidney Pollard has characterized the Treasury attitude in Britain and elsewhere as a 'contempt for production'. A first approximation to understanding the economic proclivities of governments in the 1970s and 1980s, he says, is 'the despairing conclusion that the Treasury will always choose, from any set of options available, the one which will do the most damage.' In practice this has meant that the standard and systematic response of government has been to discourage investment and hence to aggregate the problems it has a charter to remedy. The current plans to deal with the housing crisis are an example: instead of building new housing, the government will allow windfall rentier income to those who already own housing.

It is against the cynical and self-defeating proclivities of Treasury-produced policies that Australia Reconstructed is pitted. Its emphasis on intervention and its concern to create innovative sources of investment funds are not at all arbitrary. Similar suggestions were made by Keynes in the 1930s and deferred only because of political squeamishness. The easy road to anti-recessionary policy that was available fifty years ago (rearmament) is no longer so attractive; we need to make explicit, political decisions concerning the structure of our economy, the content of economic activity and the direction of investment. The government's preference, to 'get the fundamentals right', meaning to re-impose flexible adjustment mechanisms and to allow Australia to take whatever capricious place is ceded to it in a reorganized international division of production, is the route to permanent marginality. Far from
being irrelevant to the processes of industrial adjustment, the researches of non-economist social scientists have produced results which are encouraging for the advocates of 'strategic unionism'.

Over the past decade, political science and sociology have been comparing the performances of different countries’ economies during the recession. It has become apparent that the explanation of differential success in controlling unemployment and inflation is political and institutional. For example, Australia is one of a group of countries where small public sectors, low taxation and a generally non-interventionist approach to investment has been accompanied by quite poor macroeconomic outcomes. Another group, including Sweden, Austria and Norway has large public sectors, high taxation, active market interventions and low levels of unemployment. Quite clearly these differences cannot be explained in terms of laissez-faire or orthodox economists’ presumptions about the virtues of market mechanisms. In general, movement away from market modes of regulation has produced better, not worse, results. In only two countries, Switzerland and Japan, is good economic performance associated with small government and low taxation.

The ACTU has ever reason to be interested in this reality; it would be irresponsible for a labour movement not to examine closely the global empirical evidence that conservative policy makers (including those in the ALP) are incapable of apprehending, to its credit, the ACTU-TDC delegation went much further in its analysis than summary of bottom line results; it has made a sustained effort to understand the connections between the different arms of macroeconomic policy (taxes, wages, industry policy) and produced a strategy for its future negotiations and battles on these issues. This type of work was commenced in other ingredient of a well-functioning labour market. Labour market segmentation is seen as a sign of inefficiency “because it lays to waste the creative talents of large numbers of workers”.

The Swedish labour market compares favourably with the Australian on several counts. For one thing, female unemployment rates are approximately equal to the male, while in Australia the female rates have been consistently higher. Progress in overcoming labour market segmentation has been slow in Sweden. At the current rate of development, it will take an estimated ninety-four years to achieve an equal balance of the sexes in all occupations! However, the slow rate of progress “is at least backed by a national commitment to do more”. Among the steps taken are:

- a comprehensive parental leave and parental insurance scheme
- legislation requiring active steps by employers (both in the public and private sectors) to promote equality at work
- collective agreements on EEO between peak union and employer organisations
- in-plant training projects to assist women to adjust to technological change

The report concludes that much more needs to be done in Australia to promote EEO and increase child care places. Its recommendations include:

- Tripartite co-operation to develop and extend parental leave provisions in all awards and workplaces
- improved child care facilities, including government provision of a specified number of new places in an agreed timeframe, and the introduction of greater incentives for employers to provide work-based child care

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<th>Average unemployment</th>
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Source: OECD Economic Outlook 40, December 1986
countries decades ago.

OECD countries' performances during the recession are worth noting: They are summarised in Table 1.

It is clear from these figures that Australia's performance is significantly at variance with the profile that the Treasury line would have us accept. Not only is Australia one of the most unregulated economies in the world, the pattern of interventions we have developed has never been able to challenge the suspicions under which economic activity has been generated. The tariff system, to take the most notorious example, has never been buttressed by concerted attempts to plan the processes of economic development; it was not an instrument of structural rationality. This abrogation of responsibility, commensurate with the squandering of opportunities for more deliberate and effective forms of public control of the economy, is the primary characteristic of twentieth century industrialization.

Similarly, the arbitration system, longtime symbol for conservatives of the Australian economy's inflexibility, has only sporadically been a vehicle for the implementation of government incomes policy. When non-market imperatives have been applied to wage determination, the actual outcomes have not differed greatly in level or relativity, from what the market is likely to have produced; when market principles have been re-asserted, the resulting wages structure has not departed markedly from what a needs-based criterion would have produced. To this extent, the incomes policies of governments have been notional only.

In these two crucial areas (the control of industrial structure and the control of income distribution), Australia has failed in the past to develop the institutions that would be necessary to avoid the arbitrary and disheartening effects of laissez faire. As Bob Jessop said during his recent visit to Australia, we have had state intervention without an interventionist state. Reluctant and minimalist degrees of intervention have done damage to the idea of an expanded public sector in just those areas where it's been least attempted. This history of abrogation, a feature of public economic management in all Anglosaxon countries, is an imitation not only of the past failures of government, but also of the political weakness of labour. Insofar as the labour movement is now commencing its campaign for a more activist involvement in economic policy formation, it is also asserting a change in the farm of what used to be called class struggle.

The political and sociological enquiries that have prompted the ACTU examination of institutional conditions governing economic performance in Europe provide sustained empirical refutation of most of the detailed claims of economic orthodoxy. For example, not only are the deregulated economies not better economic performers, but small public sectors are no guarantee of low unemployment or inflation. Market flexibility is certainly not a condition for full employment without inflation; wage costs are not significant determinants of employment levels (compared with demand for the products); government spending does not in itself cause inflation; high taxation is nowhere an indicator of irrational economic activity; budget deficits in times of recession are neither burdensome nor irresponsible; and the active involvement of the labour movement in policy making is nowhere an indicator of irrational economic decisions.

This public failure of market principles, signalled by the poor showing of those economies which rely upon them, has not of course been accompanied by a lessening of their defenders' enthusiasm. It does, though, give the left, which is periodically bemused by its new role as defender of the economy, a rationale for intervention. This is simultaneously an explanation for the historical decline in the appropriateness of free markets. There was an era, beginning two centuries ago...
when market, mechanisms were inaugurated, as part of the bourgeois revolutions’ charter of getting capital accumulation under way, to unleash entrepreneurial activity from the constraints of feudalism and mercantilism. Two centuries later, there is decreasing reason to suppose that markets are still such unambiguously progressive mechanisms. There is substantial reason to suppose that markets are still such unambiguously progressive mechanisms. There is substantial reason to suppose that a re-development of political, and democratic, criteria would produce higher living standards, less insecurity and more extensive public control over the economy. This is what, Marx, Keynes and the new political sociology have argued.

The transition from markets to politics is not only a prerequisite for economic recovery; it is a precondition for the erosion of exclusive managerial and ownership rights. Consequently, it’s a matter of conflict between capital and labour in a sense precisely analogous to the conflict between landowners and capitalists at the dawn of capitalism. All decisions concerning accumulation...
tion and distribution are matters of class conflict; this, in the economic sphere, is what class conflict is. Therefore, struggles to change the auspices under which accumulation occurs, are certain to invoke resistance.

Labour-capital conflict is, therefore, not exhausted by overt industrial militancy; different forms of labour-capital conflict are necessarily evidenced in this process. They include conflict over accumulation decisions, conflict over government policy (taxation, wages, public spending, industry policies), the organizational activities of employer associations and employee associations, resistance to the use of profitability as the main criteria for investment and resistance by unions to wage fluctuations in response to fluctuations in profitability (implying that labour be treated as a commodity like any other).

In an era when discussion of social conflict has become unfashionable, it is important to recognize that the strategies implied by 'strategic unionism', attempts by unions to coordinate their policy struggles with both national economic requirements and the expected responses of other groups (governments, employers), cannot possibly be consensual. Whatever the tenor of political rhetoric, the reality of industrial renewal is one of conflict.

This is a neglected aspect of the left's evaluation of 'corporatist' strategies since 1983. Winton Higgins has taken some trouble to point out that the world 'corporatism' does not describe what is or needs to be done. For a start, tripartism has been used (in the UK) to suppress real incomes and to isolate key sectors of the economy (and the workforce) from others. Some of the institutions, furthermore, don't need to be tripartite at all. Wage negotiations in Sweden, for example, are highly centralized but do not involve the state. The real purpose of 'strategic unionism', political unionism', 'corporate unionism', 'economic democracy' or 'political class struggle' (call it what you will) is that it seeks to collectivize the decisions which affect our fate. The capitalist countries that have done this have not only eroded the hegemony of market prerogatives, they've made their populations more secure, more affluent, less segmented internally and more able to cope with externally induced change.

Whatever it's called, the strategic environment of Australian unionism from the Accord to Australia Reconstructed is a sign of a maturity and sophistication in our trade unions that is necessary if we're to extend democracy in the direction of economic democracy.

Although there are significant quibbles one could have with some of its details (for example, it seems to accept too readily that Australia's re-industrialization can be achieved by identifying export 'niches'), the central assertions of democracy are the most satisfying aspect of the report. The Swedish experience shows that parties of labour need to be pushed by a well educated, highly mobilized, research-backed union movement. Some of these conditions do apply in Australia; but institutionally the Swedes are a long way ahead of us.

The distinctiveness of the Swedish model comes from the gradual imposition, over a fifty year period, of political controls on the economy. At each stage — counter-cyclical policy in the 1930s, union battles for control of superannuation, pension & other investment funds in the 1950s, the inequality-inducing, centralised, solidaristic wages policy of the 1960s and 1970s and the more recent, acrimonious attempt to institute a system of wage earner funds (finally legislated into existence in 1984) — the trade union strategy has been met with prophesies of economic doom from the economists. At each stage the economists have been proved wrong. Political control of the economy has still not been effected in Sweden, arguably the most politicized of all the capitalist economies. Yet the lessons are relevant to all other rich capitalist countries. The lesson, most simply stated, is that capitalist control of a capitalist economy is increasingly incapable of delivering low unemployment and high living standards the more complex the economies become. Trade unions, rather than governments, have the job, then, of urging the creation of the requisite new institutions.

This collectivist imperative remains whether the workforce is highly unionized or not. However, it is comforting to be reminded by the Swedish experience that unions' commitment to national economic
industries creating mass unemployment and huge social injustices. If the left stands aside and criticises in its traditional oppositional way, events will pass it by, as will the chance to set the agenda politically, economically and socially.

Hobsbawm comments “If Labour wants to modernise Britain it will have to be as ready to disrupt old habits and practices as Gorbachev is in his effort to modernise the Soviet economy”. A plan for “reconstruction” (Hobsbawm uses this term) is “a way forward for socialists, even though it does not guarantee a socialist future”.

Hobsbawm concludes that, in order to convince the seventy percent of Britain’s population who are sceptical of public ownership and planning, “we have to show them concretely how and why public action, planning and policy, including common ownership, is better; not only for the victims of society but for Britain as a whole; not only to share the national cake out fairly, but to make a bigger cake to distribute; not only in the abstract, but in the existing, hard, international competitive system”.

Wealth creation, succeeding internationally, and greater science and technology education all have a familiar ring for an Australian left also facing a crisis of relevance and grappling with the free market right.

David McKnight.

recovery is compatible both with their traditional struggles for full employment and their underlying (if frequently postponed) interest in wages nor the deliberate creation of unemployment are used as surrogates for economic rationality.

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The View from the Community Sector

With the dust of the stock market crash settling around our ears and the evidence for a deep recession in the first as well as the third world piling up, it’s hard to take Australia Reconstructed’s talk of growth very seriously. But growth, we are told, is what it’s all about.

Recommendation 1.2 says, “This (the achievement of the national economic and social objective) is dependent on maintaining the maximum possible level of economic growth and development”. In other places leading trade union advocates of Australia Reconstructed have put the point more bluntly. You can’t, they have said, get redistribution (and equitable distribution is what the objective is about) without growth.

Whatever we might think of this assertion (and no one, I suspect, is arguing for a recession) we are left with a problem. What do we make of an interventionist strategy which can’t live up to its basic goal? I raise this question for two reasons. First, because it helps us to understand the important role that Australia Reconstructed can play if we are clear that it is not really the blueprint it claims to be.

Second, the growth fixation is the beginning of a path up a blind alley. This dead end itself is a consequence of a view of how the union movement should play the game; a view which has meant that, as Peter Botsman put it recently, there is a chapter missing from Australia Reconstructed. Roughly, the document acts as though there can be a two-stage reconstruction — growth through manufacturing and trade, and later (in another document?) redistribution of employment and total income. Sadly, this leads not only to a distortion of the very structures that will be needed in this mythical second stage, but also to a distorted view of who the social partners in reconstruction should be. Hence the need for the “missing chapter”.

So, what strategic use is the report now? The jury is still out on this. As with any interventionist strategy, the final verdict will depend on how well the left can use the opportunity. However, the report has provided a new benchmark for the labour movement’s approach to the government and to the economy and social planning.

It is not really possible to exaggerate the importance of the fact that the ACTU has adopted a position which insists on an integrated approach to economic and social management, and on re-establishing a full employment objective (one which sees this meaning increased participation, particularly female participation); and which argues that wages must be considered in a broader incomes framework that calls for lower wage differentials; and finally, which demands broader social participation in economic and social management.

All up, the report has given the union movement new legitimacy and credibility in its pronouncements. But, in some ways more importantly, it has given other social forces a chance to open up discussions they would have found much harder before.

The down-side of this is already obvious in the huge changes in employment, education and training. Mr. Dawkins has been handed both legitimacy and the close assistance of some of Australia Reconstructed’s mentors. The tragedy is that the document’s training and labour market strategy has been lifted out of its context and is being chased up a blind alley by
Unions are in poor organisational shape to meet the challenges of the 1990s. And, if they’re to respond effectively to the appeal of the New Right, they need to pay more than lipservice to grassroots democracy.

T
he questions concerning Australian unionism raised in recent issues of ALR (most notably in the contributions by Guille and McKnight, and the roundtable on women and unions, in ALR 100) should encourage further debate about the trends and developments that will ultimately radically restructure that movement and potentially alter its role and character. The question really isn’t whether these changes will occur, but whether they will take positive or negative directions, and what sort of role unions can and will play in their wake.

There are two main aspects to the radically changing character and role of the unions — structural and cultural. The former is rapidly evolving now, and the latter, as an important part of Australian working-class history and tradition, is under its severest threat yet.

The agenda for structural change has already been set. It has been set by the advent of radical and accelerating technology in the production process — a development which has highlighted as never before the limitations of vertical trade union structures based on craft or classification. With something like 3½ million members organised in 326 separate unions, 155 of them with less than 1000 members, the capacity of the unions to meet organisationally the challenges of today is severely curtailed.

There has been, too, a decisive shift in the composition of the workforce — a trend which, judging by overseas experience, is likely to continue. In the United States, for instance, it is estimated that only 10% of the workforce today is engaged in classical blue-collar occupations. There is no reason to believe that this trend will not be repeated here. On the one hand, this has led to a big growth in unionised white-collar workers, mainly recruited from the public sector; while at the same time there has been a decline of unionised white-collar workers in the private sector. Figures produced at the recent ACTU Congress indicated that in 1976, 42% of employees in finance, property and business services were union members — by 1986, the figure had fallen to 34%. The proportion of unionised employees in the areas of recreation, personal and other services has fallen from 41% in 1976 to 29% in 1987.

Presently standing at 55% of the workforce, the proportion of unionised workers in Australia has remained fairly stable over the past three decades — although more recent figures reveal a tendency to decline. Among blue-collar workers, however, the proportion of unionised workers to the whole has declined considerably. While this can be attributed in part to declining employment in the traditional manufacturing sector, we should need the timely warning from John Halfpenny at the ACTU Congress that the union movement is failing to attract younger workers. With the ageing of that part of the union membership which has the greatest appreciation of the traditions of solidarity and union principles, the younger parts of the workforce are more inclined to reject unionism as part of their culture — and unfortunately the union movement is doing too little, either practically or ideologically, to combat their perceptions. This is even more true of the army of unemployed, predominantly young, whose sole experience of unions is often that of onlookers watching, as they see it, unions concerned only with winning higher wages for those in employment.

Another factor exerting pressure for change is the debilitating competition between unions, and particularly craft unions, as they seek to maintain their traditional coverage of areas where boundaries have already been blurred or distorted by new technology. Many unions which forty years ago had large memberships and a strategic place in the
The economy have lost members and leverage through the processes of technological change.

Tardiness in response to these changes has not been altogether the fault of the unions. Legislation enacted in 1972 has made it extremely difficult and complicated to rationalise union organisation — even given the will to do so. But it must be said that, even allowing for legal restrictions, the union movement has been slow in defining its strategy for change. Here it is not only a question of structures, necessary as they are in enhancing the unions' effectiveness, but of an overall strategy which defines the objectives and role of the union movement in contemporary economic and social conditions. But more on that later.

It is in this confused and somewhat weakened organisational state that the unions, and indeed the very concept of unionism, are being forced to meet the present ideological and organisational offensive from the New Right. This is a worldwide phenomenon, but in the Australian context such an offensive means:

- the abandonment of the system of centralised wage-fixing, and determination of wage levels by direct bargaining at plant or industry level.
- the encouragement of non-unionism by the negotiating of contracts of employment with groups of workers at plant or industry level with or without union involvement.
- encouragement of workers not to join unions, by the enshrining of so-called 'freedom of choice' in law.
- the reduction of the role of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission in wage fixing, while strengthening its penal powers.
- full use of both industrial and civil laws to penalise and even bankrupt unions.

The Confederation of Australian Industry has produced a publication for its members which outlines 'the legal remedies available to employers faced with a strike, a picket, a secondary boycott or some other form of industrial action', through the Conciliation and Arbitration Act, the Trade Practices Act, the Crimes Act, and Common Law. The Business Council of Australia, representing Australia's top eighty corporations, and which boycotted the Hancock enquiry into industrial relations, has earmarked $1 1/2 million for conducting its own investigation into Australian industrial relations — and its terms of reference also include all of the legal avenues outlined above.

There just may be some on the left who, looking at these developments,
Bracing yourself for the orgy of self-congratulation and lapsed memories?

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say ‘So what? The labour movement has always been subject to repressive legislation and has succeeded in defeating these attacks in the past’. Some of us recall, however that it took two decades and the jailing of Clarrie O’Shea to trigger a national strike which shelved the use of, but did not remove, the iniquitous penal powers of the Arbitration Act. We should not forget, either, and perhaps need to analyse more deeply, more recent experiences such as the serious defeats inflicted on unionism in the SEQEB, Dollar Sweets and Mudginberri disputes.

The issues and tactics employed in these disputes aside, why wasn’t it possible to decisively defeat these attacks? Certainly the Robe River dispute, part of the same rightwing offensive, was handled very differently, and in consequence unionism did not receive the same setback inflicted in the other disputes mentioned above. In the Robe River dispute the workers and unions came across as the reasonable and rational party — the company as the villain.

It seems to me that basically what we should be most concerned about is the climate in which this sustained New Right offensive proceeds, and the part the offensive itself plays in creating this negative atmosphere. We have to accept, I think, that the populist rhetoric of the New Right, expressed in phrases such as ‘freedom of choice’, ‘the individual’s right to decide’, ‘the unions have too much power’, and so on, has penetrated and holds sway in the minds of a good slice of the community, and even among unionists themselves. Little matter that their slogans and accusations are falsehoods. The questions we have to address in this battle of ideas are rather how to combat the charges and the image of unionism they create; whether the unions (and we who are active in them) do act in ways such as to lend credence to these allegations; and, if we do, what is required to reform our practices.

Such is the success of this vilification of unions and their activity that it is not uncommon, in my experience, to find good, active unionists voicing criticism of other unionists’ industrial action because of its secondary effects on them personally. A petrol or train strike, for instance, can bring the most selfish and backward attitudes to the fore. And if this is the reaction among active unionists, imagine how much more pronounced it is among the general community. A strike or other industrial action, from the point of view of the workers directly involved, can be completely legitimate, but can be undermined by failing to explain to or demonstrate our concern for others affected by the action. Explanations and demonstrations of this sort are most usually left to the anti-union forces, who readily offer their own purported concern and sympathy.

I have perhaps exaggerated this trend to make a point. There are, of course, contrary examples, such as exemptions for essential services, processing of pensioners’ cheques during postal strikes, or the massive financial support exhibited in the Younger workers are more inclined to reject unionism as part of their culture.

SEQEB and other disputes. But these examples of solidarity, which are limited in scope even then, occur only when the issues involved are communicated and clearly explained, and the identity of interests which often exists between striking unionists and other people are understood. Unfortunately, this rarely happens except when a section of the movement is under serious threat, with their backs to the wall. I, for one, find little comfort in the shouts of ‘reformist sellout’ when we fail to achieve the necessary mass and community support and solidarity. While ‘sellouts’ have always been a factor, the slogan remains a simplistic explanation for what is a far more complex problem involving our credibility and social image.

It does not help the image of the union movement for it to be seen, on the one hand, fighting for a shorter working week, and then, in some circumstances, endorsing the working of massive quantities of overtime and a six-day week — a practice that reinforces the idea that all the effects of the social and economic crisis can be solved by the increases we get in our pay envelopes.

 Feather bedding and other work practices whose origins generally lay in workers’ understandable efforts to establish a measure of job security, but which become distorted over time, further contribute to this unfavourable image.

Improving the image of the union movement demands that the unions be seen to care not only for their own members, but also for the community at large. This will not be achieved by unions confining their role to the defence of their members’ living standards (important though this is), but rather by raising workers’ consciousness through involvement in decision making at all levels — plant, office, institution, industry and government. This is easier said than done, for tradition and practice has it that unions should confine their activities to wages and conditions. Unions, so the logic goes, should not be ‘political’. The difficulties are even more pronounced in the case of taking on government policies, when the remoteness of events from the workplace increases the sense of powerlessness which workers already feel in the face of government policy — let alone determining it.

Instead of seeing union organisation, whether at the industry or workplace level, as merely a broker for the amount of value to be returned to workers in wages, it is essential to develop an alternative image of the union movement’s role — one in which unions, like other democratic social institutions, are just one area (albeit an important one because of their potential clout) for the acquisition and development of democratic skills and values, the benefits of which flow beyond the movement and workplace to impact and influence society as a whole.

The advent of the Prices and Incomes Accord (Marks I and II)
was criticised in total by parts of the left as merely a device for containing wages and thus reducing living standards. That it has restrained wages is indicated by the fact that real wages have fallen by about 7% since 1983. Yet the Accord framework, to which the union movement as a whole gave its commitment, did provide a lever for union involvement in wider political and social issues. The failure of the Hawke government to deliver on other aspects of the Accord — such as taxation, investment and social services — is more a criticism of the ACTU leadership and its failure to explain and win commitment from the rank and file on these issues in the first place, so as to be able to mobilise workers around all aspects of the Accord.

The fact that commitment to all aspects of the Accord came only from the union side, and not from the employers, does not invalidate the strategy of involving the unions in economic and social planning. The question remains, however, how to involve the rank and file. I have some reservations about *Australia Reconstructed*, the main document adopted at the ACTU Congress (for instance, while a lot of attention is necessarily devoted to consensus and co-operation, insufficient recognition is accorded to the conflict endemic in whatever system of industrial relations we end up with). Nevertheless, it is clearly heading in the right direction.

Together with a proposal to reduce the inordinate number of trade unions, *Australia Reconstructed* seeks to project a strategy for the movement which can, if taken into the workshops, institutions and offices, begin a process of extending the democratic involvement and participation of unionists in economic, social and political life. But the concepts involved, not to mention the practice, will come to nought unless there is a thorough debate sponsored among the rank and file. Indeed, given that large and powerful sections of employers will strenuously resist any change in industrial relations in the direction indicated by the ACTU, the strategy will require a mass demand supported by the rank and file that union and employee rights be embodied in federal legislation as part of a new industrial relations system.

Democracy and participation in decision-making are limited concepts in our institutions and in society as a whole. They are, however, always capable of expansion — which is the real essence of that rather hackneyed phrase, 'raising the political consciousness of the working class'. Such a consciousness does not rely solely on experience — still less on experience confined to strikes over wages. However, democracy and participation in decision-making implies a challenge to existing power relations. And the challenge to authoritarian prerogatives in decision-making is something which is not only strenuously resisted by employers: more importantly, such concepts are not presently the dominant features of workers' culture, either.

This is a state of affairs which, if my analysis is valid, demands a radical expansion of the concept of the rights of workers. A new concept is needed which can replace the preoccupation with only using unions' organisational strength to defend gains and advance unionists' economic interests with a dominant conviction in their right to become part of the decision-making process.

The starting point in this process is the unions themselves, and particularly at the workplace level. It is a fact of life that many unions give lip service to 'democracy' but do not act in a democratic manner. Power is centralised and consultation proceeds in a formal way at management committees, monthly meetings or stopwork meetings. Even given the will, most union structures correspond to an era long since past, when they in most cases did allow for greater participation by the rank and file. Centralised meetings, given the demography of industry and union membership nowadays, as well as the far wider range of diversions, (TV, social clubs and so on), are no longer conducive to rank and file participation. In this regard union rules and constitutions need to be altered to allow for decentralisation of power within the union.

I want to complete this contribution with an outline of my own experiences on the job. With some four hundred employees covered by no less than thirteen separate unions, the workplace up until five years ago had no co-ordinated organisation on the job — each union did its own thing. Early attempts to initiate shop committee organisation for (firstly) the nine blue-collar maintenance unions were received with scepticism and suspicion. Ultimately, an acceptable constitution was drafted, in which not only was care paid to its democratic character (i.e. the complete autonomy of each affiliated union, procedures for rule changes, and so on), but an undertaking was made (on the insistence of one section of workers) not to impose any levies — an undertaking which ensured unanimous support.

Involving the other unions was even more difficult. This was particularly true of the largest union covering the production workers,
where the right wing officials had a policy of instructing their members not to become involved with the shop committee, and to act only through their own organisation. This policy of acting individually was often a source of friction and contention, with the maintenance workers visiting the sins of the officials on the production workers. The maintenance workers gave vent to their frustration with abuse and even racism directed towards the production workers.

The first step was to stop the abuse: to this end a process of education in behaviour was undertaken with the theme that we were all workers, and that it was only an historical accident to which union we belonged. Very few workers are able to choose their union, it was stressed; and in any case, whether it be good or bad, workers don’t often take kindly to criticism from outside of the only organisation they see as capable of defending their interests.

Not only did we succeed in stopping the abuse, but we also succeeded in initiating a process of consultation with the production workers. Although prohibited by their union from affiliating to the shop committee, the production workers’ delegates were invited to every meeting with unfettered right to participate in the discussions and decisions. We adopted a procedure whereby all decisions taken by the shop committee, whether for action or not, would be communicated to all workers, and all were invited to and allowed to speak at mass stopwork meetings. We adopted the principle that resolutions for mass meetings should always be circulated well before the meeting, in order to allow time for serious consideration. Similarly, we resolved that any issue, affecting any section of workers, whether their union was affiliated or not, would be taken up by the shop committee on their behalf. The result was the affiliation to the shop committee of, firstly, the Clerks Union, followed by the Professional Scientists Association and the Association of Technical Workers. Then, three years after the shop committee’s formation, the members of the main production workers’ union decided at a meeting of their members to defy the edict of their officials and affiliate too. Since this was by far the largest single affiliated union, the shop committee’s constitution was amended to provide that, in the event of none of its members being elected to the first three of the four-person executive, the fourth position was reserved for a representative from the union.

We believe that the job organisation of this plant is somewhat unique. At a time when there is a paucity of factory-floor organisation, our shop committee has united every union and worker, both blue and white collar, on the job. This has been achieved first because democracy is assiduously maintained. Each union retains its independence and autonomy in deciding matters affecting its members, the only proviso being that before action is taken the matter is brought to the shop committee for communication, effective advice and support. Secondly, a united job organisation, as can be seen in practice, corresponds to a felt need which cuts across the artificial divisions created by union demarcations.

Some interesting spin-offs deserve to be mentioned. In the early days, when the shop committee comprised only the maintenance workers, we approached the management to advise them of its existence. They replied that they only recognised delegates representing individual unions, union officials or the Labor Council. We responded that what mattered was the recognition of the mass of employees, and we had that.

In fact, we are now fully recognised by management, and by all but one of the unions. Fortnightly ‘project’ meetings require management to table information regarding capital expenditure, and the ability or otherwise of the workforce to carry out the volume of work assigned to it — if not, it is let out to private contractors. Sub committees of workers are involved in monitoring safety, canteen standards, and health and rehabilitation services. Some of those initially most opposed to levies it is often commented to levies are now the most assiduous raisers of finances.

While many weaknesses remain (for instance, unity is a fragile state requiring constant debate and discussion) the level of consciousness of the workers has been considerably advanced. The disciplined and judicious use of their power creates a confidence among workers in their own rights. Not only are our wages and conditions in advance of the rest of the industry, but we are in the forefront of the campaign for national rank and file industry organisation — a development which I regret to say is being frustrated by the narrow, insular attitude of sections of the official trade union movement.

Joe Palmada is an FEDFA delegate and chair of the combined unions shop committee at his workplace.
EIGHTY-EIGHT
Bicentennial Viewpoints

A year of mourning — or a missed opportunity? What does 1988 mean to you? We asked eight people, some well-known, some less well-known, for their opinions.

Humphrey McQueen
Historian and author

Just as a marriage which celebrates only its anniversaries is dead, a people who expect centenaries to replenish their self-esteem have lost the confidence to make history anew. The best way to celebrate Australia’s bicentennial is to establish our independence.

In practice, that means closing the US bases at North-West Cape, Pine Gap and Nurrungar, as well as imposing minimum prices on coal, bauxite and iron ore sold to Japanese conglomerates. If we can achieve either of those ends during 1988, next year would indeed be a cause for fireworks.

While it is monstrous to celebrate 1988 as the anniversary of the start of the destruction of Aboriginal society, many other activities are worthy of notice — for instance, the struggle against transportation, for elected government, the defeat of conscription, victory in the anti-fascist wars, and rejection of the Communist Party Dissolution Bill. Each locality and community will have its own particular struggles to rethink — from the Castle Hill Rebellion of 1804 to the Wonthaggi miners’ strike of 1934.

Nor should the Anglo-Saxon contribution be forgotten by Marxists. Our analysis of capital depended on Engels’ and Marx’s freedom to write about British developments. Since then we have benefited from the intellectual and moral contributions of William Morris, Maurice Dobb, Christopher Hill, Edward Thompson and Juliet Mitchell.

If we recall such events and people as inspiration and guides in our current activities, 1988 need not be a year of shame.

Tiga Bayles
Sydney Radio Redfern

Like a lot of black people I view the Bicentenary basically as an opportunity for the “education of a nation.” It’s like a mirror we can hold up to the rest of the world. And it’s up to Aboriginal people to project things into that mirror — leprosy, hepatitis and other health problems for black people, black deaths in custody, our treatment by the police. We can use the Bicentenary to actually change attitudes in politics — to really make a difference in what people think.

In a way it’s a good thing that it’s happened: it’s presented Aboriginal people with an opportunity we wouldn’t otherwise have had, and it’s up to us to use it. We should make it a time of contemplation rather than celebration — a time for people to look closely at society and its shortcomings. Aboriginal people can have strong feelings about what it is we’re supposed to be celebrating, and still use the year to achieve positive aims and get a positive message across.

Jack Mundey
Sydney City Councillor-in-exile

There isn’t any way that white Australians (particularly those of Anglo-Saxon origin) could justifiably engage in so-called celebration to mark two hundred years of white colonisation of this continent.

The fact that many of the first people to arrive here after 1788 were convicts doesn’t change matters much because, when they were freed, ex-convicts were as ruthless in their attitudes and conduct towards Black people as non-convicts.

Surely the best we could hope of 1988 is that there could be a new beginning; that full land rights be granted to Aboriginal people; and that the equality of all be recognised as a national goal.

Yet the political reality is that these aims are highly unlikely to be achieved. The country’s political climate is still very conservative, with the two major political forces appearing to differ very little from one another.

The hard cold fact is that both racism and sexism are evident across the country, and still need to be fought in the national consciousness by all progressive people.

Instead of celebrating, maybe
we should soberly view the tragedies committed against Black people, mourn them, and pledge, as enlightened people, to continue to fight racial discrimination against Black people throughout Australia.

1988 should be a year of shame, yet also a year of action against racism.

Michael Kirby
President
NSW Court of Appeal

The easy thing to do with a challenge is to put it into the too hard basket or ignore it or react aggressively to it. More difficult is to turn a challenge into an opportunity.

The Australian Bicentenary offends some sensitive Australians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. They regard it as an event to mourn, not celebrate. On the other hand, most people reading ALR would not be here but for the events which the Bicentenary commemorates. Accepting that reality, we should turn the Bicentenary into a reflection on history: both our successes and failures.

Our most glaring failure as a nation, relevant to the Bicentenary, has been the relationship established between the newcomers and the indigenous people of the continent. The Bicentenary should therefore be the impetus to a new era of economic, cultural, linguistic, legal and political rights for Aboriginal Australians.

When they open the new Parliament House in Canberra — with or without prayers — it would be my hope that in the presence of the Queen of Australia, all the Senators and all the Members of the House of Representatives, the proceedings should start with an affirmation of the unanimous resolve of the Australian people to do much better on this issue in the century ahead. Let there be parties and celebrations. Most Australians like such things. But let the Bicentenary also be an event for sombre and constructive self criticism and resolve about action in the future.

Colin Mercer
Cultural Studies Lecturer
Griffith University

Living in Brisbane means that we'll get a double dose in 1988. The Bicentenary and the Expo. And now that the “black hole” detention cells are to be closed down, where is the new-look government of Mike Ahern going to put all those troublemakers from the Aboriginal community who threaten to disrupt the Expo?

Critical engagement will be my motto. Critical in that the Bicentenary offers an opportunity to publicise some of these massive injustices, to embarrass federal and state governments into action and — this is the engagement part — at the same time constructively to propose new and more democratic configurations of “Australianness”. If we confine ourselves to just the first of those activities, then we are achieving nothing more than a sort of left-liberal condescension to what will undoubtedly be a popular event.

We can ignore all the hype and re-enactment fervour — except where they offer the opportunity for significant public protest and engagement — and get stuck in, where we can, in schools, community programs, universities, workplaces, local government, to make our own contribution to the critical redefinition of both the past two hundred years and the coming period. If those definitions are left in the hands of the hype-merchants and the agencies of an “official culture”, then we will be partly to blame for whatever consolidated, short-sighted and self-congratulatory image of Australia might emerge from the Bicentenary.

If we miss this opportunity critically to engage in areas such as “national memory”, “national identity” and “national character, or, more locally in the areas of community, lifestyle and neighbourhood, recognising the effects that these forms have on our political cultures and in the realm of “hearts and minds”, then we will have proved once again that, in the name of some abstract and higher principle, we can't see the wood for the trees.

Kath Walker
Poet and writer

I am not celebrating. I don't give a stuff for Expo, or the Bicentenary. I've picked up the blood money because for the last two hundred years that is all we have been given by the white people, and I will use it to the best of my ability. As for the Bicentenary, we have been here for 100,000 years. Compare that with your piddling two hundred.
DAISY CORUNNA’S STORY

Sally Morgan

Sally Morgan’s My Place was one of the most acclaimed novels of 1987. It was also an important act of reclamation of Australia’s black history. Here we reproduce an extract.

Daisy Corunna told her story to her grand-daughter, Sally Morgan, not long before she died.

Daisy was taken from her mother in her early teens, to work as a virtual domestic slave for her white natural father, Howden Drake-Brockman, and his family. In the same way, her own daughter, Gladys, also fathered by a Drake-Brockman (possibly Howden again) was taken from her at the age of three and placed in a children’s home. A previous child, whom she never saw again, and already been taken from her; and it was many years before Daisy and Gladys were able to be together again.

Fearing that Gladys’ own children would be taken away in turn (particularly after the early death of their father), neither Gladys nor Daisy told them of their Aboriginal heritage.

The stories recounted in Sally Morgan’s book are the result of her determination, after she became an adult, to seek out that heritage, and to publish what she had discovered.

My name is Daisy Corunna, I’m Arthur’s sister. My Aboriginal name is Talabue. I can’t tell you when I was born, but I feel old. My mother had me on Corunna Downs Station, just out of Marble Bar. She said I was born under a big, old gum tree and the midwife was called Diana. Course, that must have been her whitefella name. All the natives had whitefella and tribal names. I don’t know what her tribal name was. When I was comin’ into the world, a big mob of kids stood round waitin’ for to get a look at me. I bet they got a fright.

I was happy up North. I had my mother and there was Old Fanny, my grandmother. Gladdie ’minds me of Old Fanny, she’s got the same crooked smile. They both got round faces like the moon, too. I ’member Old Fanny always wore a handkerchief on her head with little knots tied all the way around. Sometimes, my granddaughter Helen ’minds me of her, too. They both short and giggly
with skinny legs. Aah, she was good for a laugh, Old Fanny.

She loved panning for tin. All the old people panned for tin. You could see it lyin' in the dirt, heavy and dark, like black marbles. Old Fanny said I had good eyes, sometimes she took me with her for luck. We traded the tin for sugar or flour. They never gave us money.

Old Fanny went pink-eye* to Hillside one day. I never saw her again. They tell me she died on Hillside, maybe she knew she was going to die. She was a good old grandmother.

On the station, I went under the name of Daisy Brockman. It wasn't till I was older that I took the name Corunna. Now, some people say my father wasn't Howden Drake-Brockman, they say he was this man from Malta. What can I say? I never heard 'bout this man from Malta before. I think that's a big joke.

Aah, you see, that's the trouble with us blackfellas, we don't know who we belong to, no one'll own up. I got to be careful what I say. You can't put no lies in a book.

Course, I had another father, he wasn't my real father like, but he looked after us just the same. Chinaman was his name. He was very tall and strong. The people respected him. They were scared of him. He was Arthur's Aboriginal father, too. He was a powerful man.

My poor mother lost a lot of babies. I had two sisters that lived. Lily and Rosie. They were, what do they call it? Full blood, yes. I was the light one of the family, the little one with blonde hair. Of course, there was Arthur, but they took him away when I was just a baby.

I 'member Old Pompee, he was the old boy that looked after the vegetable garden, he told me my mother cried and cried when they took Arthur. She kept callin' to him like. Callin' to him to come back. The people thought Arthur was gettin' educated so he could run the station some day. They thought it'd be good to have a blackfella runnin' the station. They was all wrong. My poor old mother never saw him again.

Rosie and I was close. Lily was older than me. I spent a lot of time with Rosie. I was very sad when she died. She was only young. My mother nursed her, did everything for her, but we lost her. Good old Rosie, you know I been thinkin' 'bout her lately. She was what you call a good sport.

I'll tell you a story about our white man's names. My mother was in Hedland with the three of us when an English nursing sister saw her near the well. She said, "Have you got names for your three little girls?"

Mum said, "No."

She said, "Well, I'll give you names, real beautiful ones. We'll call this one Lily, this one Rosie and this little one Daisy." I was the short one of the family. We didn't mind being called that, we thought we were pretty flowers.

I haven't told you about my brother Albert, yet. He was light, too. He used to tease me. He'd chase me, then he'd hide behind a big bush and jump out and pretend he was the devil-devil. Oooh, he was naughty to me. They took Albert when they took Arthur, but Albert got sick and came back to the station. He was a good worker. He liked playing with me. He called me his little sister.

They was a good mob on Corunna. A real good mob. I been thinkin' 'bout all of them lately. There was Peter Linch, the well-sinker. I think he was German, he lived at the outcamp. He had Rosie, not my sister Rosie, another one. Then there was Fred Stream, by jingoes, there was a few kids that belonged to him. He had Sarah, her children were really fair, white blackfellas, really.

Aah, that colour business is a funny thing. Our colour goes away. You mix us with the white man, and pretty soon, you got no blackfellas left. Some of these whitefellas you see walkin' around, they really black underneath. You see, you never can tell. I'm old now, and look at me, look at the skin on my arms and legs, just look! It's goin' white. I used to be a lot darker than I am now. I don't know what's happened. Maybe it's the white blood takin' over, or the medicine they gave me in hospital, I don't know.

The big house on Corunna was built by the natives. They all worked together, building this and building that. If it wasn't for the natives, nothing would get done. They made the station, Drake-Brockmans didn't do it on their own.

At the back of the homestead was a big, deep hole with whitewash in it. It was thick and greasy, you could cut it with a knife. Us kids used to mix the whitewash with water and make it like a paint. Then we'd put it all over us and play corroborees. Every Saturday afternoon, we played corroboree. We mixed the red sand with water and painted that on, too. By the time we finished, you didn't know what colour we were.

I 'member the kitchen on Corunna. There was a tiny little window where the blackfellas had to line up for tucker. My mother never liked doin' that. We got a bit of tea, flour and meat, that was all. They always rang a bell when they was ready for us to come. Why do white people like ringin' bells so much?

Every morning, they woke us up with a bell. It was only 'bout five o'clock, could have been earlier. We all slept down in the camp, a good way from the main house. Every morning, someone would light a lamp, walk down into the gully and ring a bell. When I was very little, I used to get frightened. I thought it was the devil-devil come to get me.

There was a tennis court on Corunna. Can you 'imagine that? I think they thought they were royalty, puttin' in a tennis court. That's an Englishman's game. They painted it with whitewash, but it didn't stay white for long. I can tell you. I had a go at hitting the ball, once. I gave up after that, it was a silly game.

I saw plenty of willy-willies up there and cyclones, too. By jingoes, a cyclone is a terrible thing! When one

* Pink-eye — term used by Aboriginal people of north-west Australia, similar to the more widely known term walkabout. A period of wandering as a nomad, often as undertaken by Aborigines who feel the need to leave the place where they are in contact with white society, and return for spiritual replenishment to their traditional way of life. Can also simply mean a holiday, usually without leave.
The future is bleak for many Australian farmers, especially small family-farmers. Farm incomes have fallen and many families have been forced off the land or into greater debt.

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was coming, my mother hid me. I wasn’t allowed to move. She was worried I might get killed. Get taken away by the wind. I was only small. I ‘member one time we hid in the kitchen, when my mother wasn’t looking, I sneaked up to the window and peeked out. You should have seen it! There was men’s hats, spinifex, empty tanks, everything blowin’ everywhere. It’s a funny thing, but those old tanks always ended up settlin’ on the tennis court.

There was a food store on Corunna. It had tin walls, tin roof and a tiny window near the top covered with flywire. You wouldn’t believe the food they had in there, sacks of apricots, potatoes, tobacco, everything. It makes my mouth water just thinkin’ about it. When it was siesta time, the other kids used to lift me up and poke me through the window. I’d drop down inside as quiet as a mouse when the cat’s after him. Then I’d pick up food and throw it out the window. If they heard someone coming, they’d cough, then run away. I’d hide behind the sacks of potatoes and wait for them to come back for me. I had a good feed on those days.

The people were really hungry sometimes, poor things. They didn’t get enough, you see. And they worked hard. You had to work hard, if you didn’t do it, then they call the police in to make you work hard. When things was like that, one of the men would put me through the window again. I suppose I should feel bad about stealin’ that food. Hunger is a terrible thing.

Aah, you see, the native is different to the white man. He wouldn’t let a dog go without his tea.

Of course, the men all wanted their tobacco as well. The white man called it Nigger Twist. It was a twist like licorice, only thicker. It’s terrible, when you think about it, callin’ something like that Nigger Twist. I mean, we all called it that because we thought that was its name.

Sometimes, we’d pinch the eggs the chooks lay in the hay shed. Aah, that old hay shed, it’s kept a lot of secrets. Now there was plenty of stockmen up North, then, and they all wanted girls. We’d be hearin’ all this noise in the hay shed, the hay’d be going’up and down, the hens’d be cluckin’, the roosters crowin’. Then, by and by, out would come a stockman and one of the girls. They’d be all covered in hay. “We just bin lookin’ for eggs,” they’d say.

There was a government ration we used to get now and then. It was a blanket, we all called it a flag blanket, it had the crown of Queen Victoria on it. Can you imagine that? We used to laugh about that. You see, we was wrappin’ ourselves in royalty.

Then there was a mirror and a comb, a cake of soap and a couple of big spotted handkerchiefs. Sometimes the men were lucky and got a shirt, the women never got anything.

I ‘member my mother showin’ me a picture of a white woman, she was all fancied up in a long, white dress. “Ooh, Daisy,” she said, “if only I could have a dress like that”. All the native women wanted to look like the white women, with fancy hairdos and fancy dresses.

Later, my mother learnt how to sew, she was very clever. She could draw anything, she loved drawing. She drew pictures in the sand for me all the time. Beautiful pictures. Maybe that’s where you get if from, Sally.

We were cunning when we were kids. There was a big water trough on Corunna, it was used for the animals, even the camels had a drink from it. Mrs Stone always warned us not to muck around in the trough. We’d wait till she was sleeping, then we’d sneak down to the garden and dive in the trough. It was slimy and there was a lot of goona* in the water, but we didn’t care. I ‘member holding my breath and swimming under the water. I looked up and I could see the faces of all the animals lookin’ down at me as if to say, “What are you doin’ in our water, child?”.

They had a good cook on Corunna for a while, Mrs. Quigley. She was a white woman, a good woman. I think Nell and Mrs. Stone, the housekeeper, were a bit jealous of her. Nell was Howden’s first white wife. They were real fuddy-duddies and didn’t like her talkin’ to anyone.

The cook had a little girl called Queenie and it was my job to look out for her. We were ‘bout the same age, ooh, we had good times! We’d laugh and giggle at anything’. We were giggling gerties, that’s what Queenie’s mother used to call us.

I taught Queenie all about the bush. We’d go out after a big rain. Sometimes, the rain was so heavy up North, it hurt when it hit you. That’s the kind of rain you get in the wet. One day, the place would be desert, the next day, green everywhere. Green and gold, beautiful. I’d take Queenie out into the bush and we’d watch a little seed grow. “Look now,” I’d say to Queenie, “it’s getting bigger”. By the time we finished lookin’, that seed’d be half an inch long.

In the evenings, I liked to sit and watch the kangaroos and other animals come down and drink at the trough. The crows ands the birds would have a drink, too, and do a bit of goona. I just liked to sit and watch them all. Course, you know, Corunna has blue hills all round it. They always looked soft that time of night. Sometimes, my mother would sit and watch, too. We knew how to count our blessings, then.

I was a hard worker on Corunna. I been a hard worker all my life. When I was little, I picked the grubs off the cauliflowers and cabbages at the back of the garden. I got a boiled sweet for that. Now the blackfellas weren’t allowed to pick any vegetables from the garden. You got a whipping if you were caught. Old Pompe, he used to sneak us tomatoes. And so he should have, he was eatin’ them himself.

We all loved the orphan lambs. We were their mother and their father. We fed them with a bottle with a turkey feather stuck in it. There was one lamb I fed, dear little thing she was, she was blind. She kept bumpin’ into the fence and the other lambs. Poor thing. I was so upset I told cook about it and she told me this story.

“You know, Daisy, when I was a young child in Sydney, I had very bad eyesight. One day, an old lady came to visit us and she asked my mother if she could have a go at curing me. Mother said yes. They sat down

* goona — faeces.
and put a single grain of sugar in each eye. Ooh, it hurt! I cried and cried, but pretty soon, I could see. I'll give you some sugar, you try that with your lamb."

I did what she said, and pretty soon, that lamb's eyes were watering all over the place. Next thing I knew, it was runnin' around like all the other lambs, not bumpin' into anything. She was a wise woman, that cook.

Aah, we played silly games when we were kids. I always played with Rosie and Topsy. That Topsy, she was one of a kind, I tell you. One day, Mrs. Stone gave her a cake of soap and told her to take a bath. You know what she did? She threw the soap back and said, "I'm not takin' no bath!" Can you 'magine cheekin' a white woman like that? Aah, she was great fun, old Topsy.

There was a creek that cut across Corunna in the wet. we loved swimming in it and catching fish. They were like sardines, we threw them on the hot ashes and then gobbled them up. They were nice, but you had to be careful of the bones.

All sorts of wild fruit grew along the creek. There was a prickly tree with fruit like an orange, but with lots of big seeds in it. You could suck the seeds. Then there was another one shaped like a banana, that was full of seeds, too. You ate the flesh and spat out the seeds. There wasn’t much food in that one, just juice. There was another prickly tree that had yellow flowers like a wattle, wild beans grew off that tree. When they swelled up, we picked them and threw them in the ashes. They were good.

The best one of all was like a gooseberry bush. Aah, if you could find a patch of that, no one saw you, you just stayed there and ate. You could smell those ones a good way away, they smell like a ripe rockmelon. We'd sniff and say, "Aah, something ripe in there, somewhere". We’d lift up the bushes looking for them, they were only tiny. When we found them, we’d say, "Hmmmn, mingimullas, good old mingimullas". I never tasted fruit like those mingimullas. They had soft green leaves like a flannel, ooh, they were good to eat.
There was another tree we used to get gum from to chew — it grew on little white sticks. We’d collect it and keep it in a tin. It went hard, like boiled lollies. You know, jubes always ‘mind me of that gum. Perhaps that’s why I like jubes.

Rosie and I were naughty. We’d pinch wild ducks’ eggs and break up their nests. And we’d dig holes to get lizards’ eggs. We could tell where the lizards had covered up their eggs. We’d dig them all out, get the eggs and bust them. Those poor creatures. They never harmed us and there we were, breakin’ up their eggs. We’re all God’s creatures, after all.

Rosie and I used to catch birds, too. We’d get a bit of wire netting and make a cage, then we’d take it down the creek and throw wheat around. We kept the cage a little bit lifted up and we tied a long bit of string to the wood underneath.

You should have seen all the cockies, they loved wheat. When there was a big mob of them, we’d pull the string, down would come the cage and we would have them trapped. Trouble was, we couldn’t do anything with them, they kept biting us. In the end, we let them go. We did silly things in those days.

When I got older, my jobs on Corunna changed. They started me working at the main house, sweeping the verandahs, emptying the toilets, scrubbing the tables and pots and pans and the floor. In those days, you scrubbed everything. In the mornings, I had to clean the hurricane lamps, then help in the kitchen.

There were always poisonous snakes hiding in the dark corners of the kitchen. You couldn’t see them, but you could hear them. Sssss, sssss, sssss, they went. Just like that. We cornered them and killed them with sticks. There were a lot of snakes on Corunna.

Once I was working up the main house, I wasn’t allowed down in the camp. If I had’ve known that, I’d have stayed where I was. I couldn’t sleep with my mother now and I wasn’t allowed to play with all my old friends.

That was the worst thing about working at the main house, not seeing my mother every day. I knew she missed me. She would walk up from the camp and call, “Daisy, Daisy”, just like that. I couldn’t talk to her, I had too much work to do. It was hard for me, then. I had to sneak away just to see my own family and friends. They were camp natives, I was a house native.

Now, I had to sleep on the homestead verandah. Some nights, it was real cold, one blanket was too thin. On nights like that, the natives used to bring wool from the shearing shed and lay that beneath them.

I didn’t mind sleeping on the verandah in summer because I slept near the old cooler. It was as big as a fireplace, they kept butter and milk in it. I’d wait till everyone was asleep, then I’d sneak into the cooler and pinch some butter. I loved it, but I was never allowed to have any.

Seems like I was always getting into trouble over food. I’m like a lamb that’s never been fed. I ‘member once, Nell asked me to take an apple pie to the house further out on the station. Nell’s real name was Eleanor, but everyone called her Nell. Anyway, I kept walkin’ and walkin’ and smellin’ that pie. Ooh, it smelt good. I couldn’t stand it any longer. I hid in a gully and dug out a bit of pie with my fingers. It was beautiful. I squashed the pie together and tried to make out like it was all there. Hmmm, that was good tackle, I said to myself as I walked on.

When I gave the pie to Mrs. Stone, I had to give her a note that Nell had sent as well. If I had have known what was in that note, I’d have thrown it away. It said, if any part of this pie is missing, send the note back and I will punish her.

Mrs. Stone looked at the note, then she looked at the pie, then she said, “Give this note back when you go”. I did. And, sure enough, I got whipped with the bullocks cane again.

Nell was a cruel woman, she had a hard heart. When she wasn’t whippin’ us girls with the bullocks cane for not workin’ hard enough, she was hittin’ us over the head. She didn’t like natives. If one of us was in her way and we didn’t move real quick, she’d give us a real hard thump over the head, just like that. Ooh, it hurt! White people are great ones for thumpin’ you on the head, aren’t they? We was only kids.

Aah, but they were good old days, then. I never seen days like that ever again. When they took me from the station, I never seen days like that ever again.

They told my mother I was goin’ to get educated. They told all the people I was goin’ to school. I thought it’d be good, goin’ to school. I thought I’d be somebody real important. My mother wanted me to learn to read and write like white people. Then she wanted me to come back and teach her. There was a lot of the older people interested in learnin’ how to read and write, then.

Why did they tell my mother that lie? Why do white people tell so many lies? I got nothin’ out of their promises. My mother wouldn’t have let me go just to work. God will make them pay for their lies. He’s got people like that under the whip. They should have told my mother the truth. She thought I was coming back.

When I left, I was cryin’, all the people were cryin’, my mother was cryin’ and beatin’ her head. Lily was cryin’. I called, “Mum, Mum, Mum!”. She said, “Don’t forget me, Talahue!”. They all thought I was coming back. I thought I’d only be gone a little while. I could hear their wailing for miles and miles. “Talahue! Talahue!” They were singin’ out my name, over and over. I couldn’t stop cryin’. I kept callin’, “Mum! Mum!”.

SALLY MORGAN is the author of My Place.

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PARENT POWER
Crisis At The Chalkface

Simon Marginson

Private schools are becoming steadily more popular with parents. And public education's supporters have been left flat footed. The reason, argues Simon Marginson, is that the left has had very little to say about parenting.

Comprehensive public education has, quite rightly, long been central to the agenda of left and socialist politics. Education's long-term influence on the shaping of its students and of social relationships can be profound. The present crisis of public (government) schooling therefore requires the attention of all on the left.

It needs to be stressed that this crisis does not derive from a material decline in the quality of public schooling. On all indicators except for the condition of buildings (literacy and numeracy; range and depth of curricula; participation rates; teacher qualification; class sizes), public schooling is better than it was ten years ago and much better than it was twenty years ago. Nor is there any clear evidence that private schools are educationally superior.

Nonetheless, the drift of enrolments from public to private schooling is accelerating. Between 1977 and 1986 the proportion of all school students enrolled in private schools rose from 21.5 percent to 26.4 percent:1 it is higher at the top end of secondary school, and in Victoria and the ACT. Since 1977,
100,000 public school students have been lost to private schools.

There are four main elements that explain the net enrolment drift to private schools.

Firstly, State Aid to private schools has been a necessary precondition of enrolment drift. It has made private schooling relatively cheaper than before by improving class sizes and other facilities while holding down fees. It has increased the number of enrolment places available, through new schools and growth of existing schools.

With the cost of private schooling falling as a proportion of income for some families, more parents can enrol their student children in private schools. State Aid does not explain the existence of demand for private schooling in itself, but it explains why that demand has become effective demand for an increasing number of parents.

Secondly, competition for jobs and places in higher education has intensified in the context of youth unemployment, increasing school retention rates, the scarcity of higher education places and the rising Year Twelve cut-off scores needed for entry, and the declining labour market value of all educational credentials. For many parents equal education opportunity is not enough; they're searching for relative advantage for their student children. The growing private school sector — seen to be associated with social success — provides the avenue for investment in relative advantage.

Public education is now paying for the failure of the educational meritocracy to deliver. For most of the post-war period education was sold as the royal road to upward social mobility. Combined with the idea of equality of opportunity, this secured wide support for the expansion of public education, but at the price of inflated expectations.

Education had been sold as the originator of individual employment opportunities, so when room at the top turned out to be limited and the value of educational credentials fell, it was hardly surprising that people blamed education for the labour market's shortcomings. (One of the reasons why "right to work" campaigns have lacked support is the meritocratic idea that attaining work is an individual responsibility expressed through individual effort in education).

The private school individual investment model offers an apparent means of satisfying the desires for income and career through education that the meritocratic conception has failed to fulfil. It offers parents an identity attuned to the "solution" of the problem of their child's future: the identity of wise individual investor.

Third, New Right free market ideas have positioned people against government services financed by taxation and in favour of market services and private effort. These ideas find resonance with people because of their personal experience of the relative increase in Pay As You Earn taxation and their self-identity as market consumers, from which traditional bureaucratic public services appear alienating — an alienation recognised and played upon by the New Right.²

**Denial of desire is not a very effective strategy.**

Finally, all of these factors have come together in the development of a powerful new discourse of good parenting as private school parenting. Increasingly, parents are persuaded that to be good parents they must place their children in private schools. Increasingly, too, parents who can afford private schooling feel guilty if they leave their children in the public system. As entrepreneur Dick Smith was reported as saying recently in *Time Australia*:

A lot of people are being conned by peer pressure ... Instead of making a rational decision on the evidence, they think "People might think I'm neglecting my children if I don't send them to a private school".³

Parents are persuaded that they should make economic sacrifices (for example, by working an extra job) in order to pay for private school fees; the experience of sacrifice reinforces the sense of good parenting and absolves guilt. The notion of good parenting as private school parenting has two main aspects: private schools are seen to provide a climate of moral security and child safety (discipline, curriculum, the benefits of a selected student population) and private schools are seen to provide relative advantage through improved chances of reaching higher education, the development of useful social networks and the acquisition of style and language.

This new discourse about good parenting is not simply a product of New Right advocacy of private and market forms. It also has separate origins in the growing importance of education and the evolution of attitudes to parenting itself; parents are now defined as themselves educated and capable of decisions about education, and autonomous in relation to trained professionals. Our problem is that these new attitudes to parenting have become associated with private schooling.

The freedom of choice argument gains much of its power from its presentation of the market model as the opportunity for good parenting. The fact that the choices it offers are beyond the reach of many and the best choices are closed to nearly all does not reduce the power of the argument. Desires that are unachievable can still be motivating desires. And for an increasing number of people, the desire for private schooling can be fulfilled.

The point that cannot be overemphasised is that the shift in ideas about good parenting is felt acutely by individual parents. It is therefore very important and cannot be ignored.

Given these factors, the force of the debate about school standards becomes clear. The issues raised by the Old Right and New Right critics of "standards" in public schooling embrace the whole spectrum of parental anxieties; from moral...
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security and discipline, to the social qualities of the school's enrolment, to the values expressed in the curriculum, to teachers as suitable guardians for their children, through to the perceived relative educational performance of public schools (numeracy and literacy, academic rigour, incidence of high achievement, and so on). Any and all of these elements can invoke fears that leaving children in the public education system constitutes bad parenting.

Teachers' stock response has been to concentrate on teaching and learning standards and to assert that measured evidence shows that educational standards in public schools have not declined, have in fact improved and are as good as those found in private schools. This response is necessary and sound, but it is not a sufficient political strategy in itself. In fact, by itself it largely misses the point.

Parents see their children as children rather than (as teachers see them) as students. The dynamics of the standards debate and the public/private debate turn around parenting, not education. We are grappling with a parenting debate and not an educational debate.

The arguments about inadequate numeracy and literacy actually gain their credibility from the prior assumption that good parenting is associated with private schools (the presence of this prior assumption explains why anecdotal evidence of failings in the basics is taken as gospel while solid evidence of improvements — which contradicts the assumption — is easily ignored). Arguments about educational inadequacies in public schools serve as a post hoc rationalisation of decisions to be "good parents"; it is not easy to acknowledge openly that you are committed to private education because of the relative advantage it offers.

Even in cases where individual parents are convinced that educational standards in public schools are adequate this will not necessarily shake their common sense association of private schooling with moral security and relative advantage. Within the notion of good parenting as private school parenting it can be quite consistent to support public schools as a social project while continuing individually to use the private schools. Many parents on the left are in this position.

Demands for an end to State Aid to private schools are also justified in themselves, but as a strategy this is not enough either. At present the anti-State Aid demand is merely seen by many as denial of parent's aspirations to be good parents. Denial of desire is not a very effective strategy.

Parenting is a blank space on most left agendas.

To end State Aid and to achieve the necessary popular support for resource needs in public schools we must shift the attitude to parenting in education, and legitimate state education provision in the eyes of parents. Unless good parenting becomes associated with public schools we cannot win.

And if we do not win, the public schools will eventually be destroyed as comprehensive schools, becoming low quality educational ghettos occupied only by the poorest families — while the rest climb over each other endlessly to secure relative advantage in private education (a zero-sum game if ever there was one)

We urgently need a left intervention in schooling that is positive and productive rather than purely defensive;

Firstly, we must start to take the politics of parents and parenting in education more seriously. The dominant notions of parenting have tended to be conservative and oppressive and parenting is a blank space on most left agendas. But parenting does happen and it's a perfectly good thing. Parenting is also now a political issue in a way it has never been before.

As Angela McRobbie said last year in Marxism Today:

There is no doubt that parents have been invoked by the media and in particular by the mass dailies for their own political purposes. To some on the left, they are already a lost cause... This is a dangerous assumption. Apart from anything else it allows the Right to court the parents unchallenged. It also further isolates the Left from feelings, not to say popular passions.

Parenting has entered the domain of public concern and shows no sign of retreating back into the more hidden sphere of the home. It is subject to greater professional scrutiny, more extensive media debate... To speak as a mother or parent is no longer to speak falteringly from within the realms of a privatised and a political sphere. On the contrary it is to insist that these old distinctions be done away with.

Parent power is here. Parents see themselves as people with the right and the responsibility to make decisions about education. This active concern is not in any way confined to middle class parents. Angela McRobbie again: "The myth on the left that working class or immigrant parents are not deeply involved in their children's education should be dislodged for once and for all."

Secondly, public schools must be opened up much more to parental involvement in school decision-making. This means bringing parents into schooling as equal partners with teachers, not only in school administration (discipline, excursions, special needs, etc.) but also in teaching and learning matters. It means involving all parents and not just a few parents on School Councils.

The automatic assumption that "teachers know best" will have to go.

The active involvement of parents in the life of the school provides an effective way of overcoming their anxieties about moral security, child safety, curriculum content and educational standards. It can also provide public schools with the solid political constituency that they sorely need at present. A new model of public schooling based on parent-
teacher partnership can also provide a political model of parental involvement that is more attractive than the economic (market) relationship between parents and private schools.

Most private schools involve parents in fund-raising and social activity, but (like most public schools) they shut them out when the educational action is on.

Therefore private schools do not fully encompass the pervasive new notions of parents as autonomous and competent in relation to professionals. The opportunity has been presented to public education. The democratic public sector model based on collective production (the unity of producers and consumers) can provide a level of parent participation that can fully satisfy the desire for good parenting in relation to schooling.

This collective public sector model is the liberating political counter we need to the individualised economic determinism of the New Right.

Thirdly, to effectively involve parents as partners in the public school enterprise teachers will need to change some of their professional practices. The automatic assumption that 'teachers know best' will have to go if parents are to be brought into decisions about methods of teaching and assessment, the nature of homework, the pattern of school sport; as well as decisions about, say, discipline or whether there should be separate classes for women students.

Teachers have long held parents at arm's length by assuming professional superiority as the scientific technicians of education. This form of the professional role is the product of well-established norms of child development and educational practice. These norms lead the teacher to blame the home environment (over-protective or neglectful) if the child is not fully 'educable', and the parent to blame the teacher if the child is not fully successful.

Building an education partnership in public schooling means that these deeply structured barriers need to be dismantled. But the few schools where there is a high level of parental involvement have usually found it easier to overcome parent/teacher divisions than either group expected.

NOTES

5. I am not arguing here that the content and structure of the curriculum should be determined by the local school. It is important that central government frameworks guarantee every child's right to mathematics, language, and so on.
The Most Beautiful Store In The World

Gail Reekie

I was recently given a postcard bearing the slogan 'I shop therefore I am'. My immediate response was to agree. Shopping can be pleasurable, and what I buy to some extent expresses my individuality.

But shopping only gives me pleasure under certain conditions: that is, when I find what I'm looking for at a price that seems reasonable, or when my desire to be self-indulgent overcomes good economic sense, or when I'm not feeling hot, impoverished or grumpy.

I certainly don't enjoy it when what I want is outrageously expensive, and what I can afford appears with depressing ubiquity in every chain store in Sydney. Shopping can be, let's face it, a tiresome and anxiety-inducing chore to be dispensed with as quickly as possible.

To make matters worse, consumerism comes dangerously close to being ideologically unsound from the moral highgrounds of socialism and feminism. As a socialist I know that consumption is a capitalist strategy to divert class conflict; as a feminist I know that consumption is a patriarchal plot to keep me at home and enslave me to fashions at best beyond sense and at worst life-threatening. Yet these knowledges don't stop me from shopping, or from occasionally deriving personal enjoyment from buying pretty things.

It is this conjunction of pleasure and pain that makes consumption the subject of somewhat tortured debate, especially on the left. Some writers characterise us (or, more safely, the working class) as the defenceless prey of mass marketing strategies; others argue that we have the autonomy to construct our own meanings and self-image from commodities in general and fashion in particular.

Is consumption a trap or a political act? Until recently we have had little choice but to cast ourselves in the role of victim or heroine in the social and historical drama of consumption.

Two writers have recently suggested alternatives to this double bind. Judith Williamson argues that the left cannot afford to dismiss or boycott consumption as counter-revolutionary. Rather than adopt the postmodernist option in which 'one can claim as radical almost anything provided it is taken out of its original context,' she suggests we analyse consumption as a form of ownership and control denied us in the productive sphere.

Shopping is a socially endorsed event in which we translate our wants and needs into consumption. I shop therefore I am a social being.

Wolfgang Haug also stresses that commodities and the way they are marketed mesh with our psychic needs. He suggests that manufacturers, advertisers and retailers use 'commodity aesthetics' — the creation of a sensually-appealing appearance designed to realise exchange...
value — to turn objects into desirable and therefore saleable articles.

What they market is the appearance, not the substance of commodities. Producers and their agents sell the consumer the promise or illusion of use value, where use value represents the material and nonmaterial necessities of life. The advertising industry 'packages' commodities in ideas, associations and meanings which reflect the perceived but nevertheless real sensual needs of the consumer.

Let me illustrate Haug's theory by describing a familiar showcase of 'commodity aesthetics': the recently remodelled ground floor of David Jones Elizabeth Street store in Sydney. The store designers have used colour, light, texture, odour, sound and reflective surfaces to create a store-specific 'commodity aesthetics' intended to promote a distinctive corporate image as well as sell merchandise.

The impression the shopper has on entering the store is of the restrained elegance associated with precious stones and their qualities of durability, luminosity, clarity and agelessness. The walls and ceilings echo the discreet grey of the marble floor but suggest a more yielding, velvety texture. Constellations of small spotlights in the ceilings pick up the shine from the floor and the glitter of brass fittings, glass display cases and mirrored columns. The mirrors are faceted to increase their reflective surface, as diamonds are cut to make them sparkle.

Neutral colours associated with bourgeois good taste dominate, and link the cosmetic and jewellery sections of the floor — silver, gold, grey and pastels. These central departments are ringed in a controlled anarchy of colourful profusion by islands of brilliant colour encapsulated in scarves, flowers, handbags, stockings and belts.

Music from a (grey) grand piano — according to Haug the salesroom is designed as a stage on which an elaborate entertainment is enacted and commodities arranged — and scent from the perfume and dried flower counters, add auditory and olfactory dimensions to the store's assault on the senses.

David Jones' display of expensive chocolate captures in essence the 'commodity aesthetics' of the department store. Arranged with military precision, some plain, some decorated with a single restrained motif, some adorned with crystalised violets, others wrapped and shimmering like coloured jewels, the bite-sized morsels do indeed offer the illusion of sensual gratification to those shoppers unfortunate enough to be waiting for the lifts to which the counter is strategically adjacent.

'Commodity aesthetics' can only be maintained, and exchange value realised, with the co-operation of the store's employees. Their appearance and behaviour must be as polished and unblemished as the counters they stand behind. Walk through the store during a quiet time of the day and you will see numerous assistants, armed with spray guns, busily spraying and wiping. I wonder, too, what it feels like to stand on marble floors all day long.

But for most customers the marble floors, grand piano and glittering displays do represent a comparatively pleasant shopping environment. The experience of walking around the Elizabeth Street David Jones is physically and emotionally different — I would argue more enjoyable — than that of loading up the trolley in the local Coles New World. This difference is certainly in part a result of differences in the commodities themselves. But it also reflects contrasting approaches to commodity aesthetics.

Department store managers have been leaders in mass marketing techniques since the late nineteenth century. Australian drapery shops developed into 'emporia' or 'universal providers' in the 1880s and 1890s when they expanded their range of stock to cover furniture, ironmongery, crockery, grocery, leather and fancy goods. By the time the term 'department store' came into common use in the 1920s, Sydney big stores were selling almost every variety of manufactured goods.

The managers of Sydney's big stores, with the aid of advertisers and sales experts, began deliberately to cultivate a mass market after 1905. During the next twenty years they increasingly adopted, refined and articulated a theory of marketing that embraced window dressing, interior displays, advertising, and store promotions.

The dark and cluttered interiors of the nineteenth century emporium changed, at the insistence of the new store design experts of the 1920s, into open and bright-lit floors in which dividing walls were removed to give the customer the impression of limitless space. When David Jones' Elizabeth Street store was opened in 1927 newspapers praised its 'palatial, lofty ceilings, broad aisles (and) glass display fixtures, making possible the inspection of almost every article.'

Retailers used glass display cases and tables instead of drawers and shelves — the aim being to bring the stock out where the customer could see, touch and be tempted. As one magistrate disturbed by an apparent increase in shoplifting grumbled in 1929, 'it is scarcely possible to walk through a shop without dragging something off a table.'

A major theme in the embryonic marketing theory of the 1920s was the need to sell not the goods themselves, but the 'sentiments' attached to them. Retailers were advised by sales experts to sell youth not hats, cleanliness not soap, fashion not gowns, social status not pianos. Or, as Berlie's Advertising Director advised his colleagues alas in 1929, 'Never mind about the commodity. Sell ideas.'

Berlie's corset pageants of the late 1920s show commodity aesthetics in action. 'Radiant Woman at Beauty's Shrine', for example, placed live models wearing corsets in moonlit gardens of dream, enchanted caves and magic mirrors in which modern womanhood received the 'homage of living jewels in gorgeous raiment.' Physically uncomfortable and restrictive garments, corsets were aesthetically packaged as modernity, beauty and femininity.

Women flocked to these and other live modelling presentations in
Sydney’s department stores. They enjoyed the free show — frequently staged during lunchtimes so that working women could attend — as a source of fashion information, aesthetic spectacle and simple entertainment. Some, no doubt, bought the goods. But the presentations also, as Haug suggests, played on and substantially fulfilled women’s desire for sensual gratification.

There were perhaps other ways in which women selectively appropriated elements of commodity aesthetics for their own purposes. One working woman told a government inquiry into the cost of living in 1918 that she chose to pay more for a camisole trimmed with lace because only a nun would wear plain underclothes. Others clearly enjoyed the rich carpets of the ladies’ showroom, the comfort of the lounges provided for them and the fun of trying on a number of hats with no intention of buying.

Half a dozen pearl buttons, an artificial flower or a few inches of pretty ribbon satisfied many women’s desire for beauty and pleasure without making them either the dupes of capital or agents of resistance. They enjoyed the sensations of being in the store, viewed with pleasurable anticipation the prospect of ownership, and appreciated the aesthetic lures deliberately placed in their path by retailers and advertisers.

The decision to buy (and how much to buy) depended on a separate set of material conditions and a different mental process. To extend Haug’s theory, we could say that these consumers removed and appropriated the aesthetic wrapping of commodities without necessity buying — literally or metaphorically — the goods.

Haug’s critique of ‘commodity aesthetics’, then, helps us to escape the consumer as victim/agent dichotomy. But it does little to look behind the sexual asymmetry in consumption: that is behind the fact that historically consumers have been predominantly female, and that retailers have since at least the late nineteenth century been aware of that fact.

If mass marketing has manipulated and met the sensual needs of the consumer, then I would suggest it has done so in a social and historical context in which sensuality has been by definition feminine. Retailers and their allies have constructed their marketing theories around a common perception of women as more irrational, seducible and impulsive than men.

Judith Williamson suggests that ‘the point about consumerism is that people are getting something out of it — but something which the left must be able to offer in a different form’. If the left is to tackle seriously and appropriate the politics of consumerism, then it must do so not only by providing an alternative source of control and security but also by recognising that women might be getting something different out of it than men.

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French Lessons

Marilyn French’s The Women’s Room was a landmark in the feminist movement. It told of the lives of a generation of modern women, and in doing so literally changed the lives of many of the women who read it. Since then, Marilyn French has written The Bleeding Heart, Beyond Power and, most recently, Her Mother’s Daughter, published on the tenth anniversary of The Women’s Room. Nicci Gerrard talked to her about her books and beliefs.

It is now ten years since The Women’s Room was published. Women who shied away from the word feminism read it and their lives were transformed. Can you say, now, why it had such a powerful effect?

We do not realise the degree to which we are censored in our public speech. The Women’s Room spelt the truth about how a lot of women felt. I knew because I’d listened to them. I simply told the truth and women knew it wasn’t a truth coming to them from outside but a truth they had known and felt and never before seen reflected in their culture. When they did see it they recognised it instantly and realised that they were not alone and the reason that they were unhappy was not because they were neurotic or bad — but that this was a cultural fact of what happens to women. And it empowered them. Possession of the truth is always a source of control and security but also by recognising that women might be getting something different out of it than men.

The novel was also so important because it was both radical and deliberately popular, which is a difficult tightrope to walk. Did you consciously choose this form?

Very much so. It was one of the reasons that it was so hard to write — the entire problem lay in tying in the right voice. I worked on it for many years. I worked on many versions, and then I thought of splitting the central consciousness between the enlightened and the unenlightened woman. I was very aware of having to translate the
radical core in order to take it to ordinary people in a language they would understand.

Did you yourself live the suburban, trapped life you describe in The Women's Room?

Yes. Of course, I never believed it at the time I was living it. I kept thinking that I wasn't; not really. I was really a writer and of course this had nothing to do with the real me — and yet somehow or other it had everything to do with me. It was my life.

In the ten years since The Women's Room has been published, how do you think feminism has changed in the States?

I think that it is much less confrontational. I think the second stage is a process of growing in deep, burrowing in, making sure that those laws that are already on the books are actually abided by. That's one level of activism. And there is now a deepening at the roots of feminism so that there are lots of women who will say: 'I'm not a feminist but I want equal pay for equal work, I certainly think my husband ought to do half the housework and childcare and so forth'. Women are now saying, 'I want to drive a truck so why shouldn't I?' They wouldn't have dared to say things like this twenty five years ago.

And the third thing that is happening, which in some ways does seem to me to be the most important, is the theory and intellectual work that is going on. The most brilliant stuff is coming from feminists. It only hits a small part of the population, the rest of the country probably doesn't even know it's happening — but students are exposed to it more and more and maybe within fifteen or twenty years we will have built the foundations to enable us to come up with alternative political forms.

You sound very optimistic about the future.

I am optimistic in some ways. I think the entire born again movement, the renewal of patriarchal religion which is a backlash against feminism, is frightening. But I'm not so worried about women. The religious revival and the political content of that religious revival doesn't threaten women so much as it threatens blacks. It is a pernicious philosophy and I suppose women are threatened — for instance, abortion rights may be in danger.

What I would like to see in every nation in the world is 50% of its budget being spent on children and on fostering childcare. The most important thing a country produces is the next generation. We need schools and medical care and educational care and decent ways for mothers to have a baby and yet find a way to support themselves — and to be up against it: are you going to have a baby or are you not going to have a baby?

Which brings us to your latest novel, Her Mother's Daughter, a book which deals with those very issues as they affect and damage four generations of women. It is dedicated to your mother who died last year — is it something you have needed to write for a long time?

Yes. My mother was the most important person in my life; my feelings about her deeply affected my personal life. But I think there is a terrible isolation in motherhood where one poor woman alone is responsible. The little infant is all potential and there is no way that you can respond to everything in that baby.

You ask a woman to sacrifice her life for her child and she'll do it just as she's been doing it for a long time — but she's going to charge those children for it because she's a human being not a saint.

Her Mother's Daughter addresses the questions of self-censorship and self-sacrifice. Are you aware of areas of self-censorship in your own life and writing?

I think that there are different forms of censorship. For instance, I could never portray a black person or a Jew as evil. There's just too much history on the other side and I could never do it. I think that I could do it even though there are bad black people, bad Jewish people and very bad American Indians. But I don't think I suffer from too much self-censorship except for that. In this book certainly I don't portray mothers as saints and in all of my books women hurt each other even if they are also sympathetic. I try to be honest. I really do try to be honest.

NICCI GERRARD is the author of a forthcoming book on women's publishing.
Pleasures Of The Fresh

Howard Guille

Eating well is a pleasurable activity. It is also a collective activity and a chance to savour food, ideas and conversation. Eating well is more than a matter of taste. It is a positive act of transcending commercial constraints. Preferring fish to meat is an individual matter; having horizons limited to the frozen food cabinets of Coles and Woolworths, however, is another thing altogether.

I would also distinguish eating well from dining out. Not that one cannot eat well in restaurants — though it is harder, and probably more expensive, than one thinks. But it necessitates putting one's entire trust in others. The customers' discretion is limited to basic preference — Chinese, Thai, English, Australian cuisine — and to choices from the usually uninformative menu. From there matters are in the hands of owners, operators and staff. They choose the ingredients and determine the care in cooking, carving, slicing, serving and so forth. Perhaps only in operating theatres and aeroplanes is one less in command of one's fate.

The trust can be misplaced. Some examples, from Brisbane. A Sri Lankan restaurant which put five sets of curries from a long menu, on the table, within five minutes of ordering — doubtless, courtesy of the freezer and the microwave. Either that, or all the sauces were the same and the substantive part — chicken, lamb, beef, prawn, vegetables — were pre-cooked. The freezer-microwave theory is more charitable. Yet, a twice-cooked (and probably twice frozen) prawn lacks any of the qualities of crustacea. Still, the powered chilli of the sauce suitably sand-blasted taste.

Another Brisbane restaurant: lunch on a hot day. The simplest of the dishes suited to a sweaty day appeared to be 'marinated fish in a coconut and lime dressing served in a coconut shell'. With due temerity I asked was it fresh fish? Certainly. What sort of fish? After a delay: the cook thought it was sea perch. (This is the orange roughie dredged from mid-Tasman which has to be skinned; it is invariably frozen). It hardly made any difference to ask whether it had been marinated frozen or thawed.

Such restaurants survive because too many of their customers do not know about food. It is one of Australia's worst inheritances from industrial Britain, now reinforced by American values. Yet it is possible to have a food-loving culture. Italy is one example. Eating in Italy is pleasurable because Italians value food. Spaghetti with garlic and oil is a pleasure because each of the three items is carefully selected. Durum wheat pasta, not over-boiled, Lucca oil, white plump garlic. Sufficient excitement added by fresh ground black pepper. Its delights are increased by a glass of fresh chianti and salt-free bred.

To make a meal, add a little anti-pasto; cold grilled egg-plant, olives, tomato salad, Tuscan salami; each carefully herbed. A first plate of pasta followed by a second meat plate of herb-stuffed roast pork or beef. A green salad to clean the tongue followed by a peach or nectarine. As a menu it sounds unexciting. Yet for three weeks last year such meals provided me sustained eating pleasure. Moreover, not in a restaurant or trattoria, but in the refectory of the European University Institute in Florence. Three weeks without the same pasta dish being repeated, and with no evident cycle such as 'it's Monday so it's roast beef.'

As if these pleasures were not enough, a memorable lunch in the Tuscan Hills at Ristorante La Calcinaia, San Casciano Val di Pesa. Anti-pasto of home-made sausage, eggplant, pepper (grilled over a flame and skinned and put in oil and lemon), followed by three pastas — ravioli with fresh ricotta, spaghetti...
with oil and garlic, penne with tomato and chillie (penne all 'arrabbiata; the fierce or angry). Then a large tray of vongole (pipis) and another of mussels; plain steamed turkey, chicken, charcoal-grilled. Simple, perfect and fresh; though there is nothing easy about grilling poultry.

The simplicity stems from a reverence for ingredients. This is made possible by the supply: tomatoes sold brilliant ripe on the stalk, bundles of mixed leaves for green salad, fruit sold ripe to eat, bread baked twice daily and sold by the piece. Such food is easily appreciated; shopping takes a little longer than the dash round the supermarket but there is more to see and smell. Indeed the Medici had, by the Thirteenth Century, bred some hundreds of varieties of lemons, peaches and nectarines at the Villa della Petraia. It is a world away from the Australian experience of buying fruit which has still to ripen and a situation where apples are about the only fruit sold by variety.

Since ingredients are the essence of Italian cooking, the quality of a restaurant is readily assessed. Little wonder that it is the departure point for other Western cuisines. I still savour the crostini — toasted bred with a dressing of fresh oil and crushed garlic. Any resemblance to the ubiquitous garlic bread of Australia is accidental.

Good food should be part of the everyday life. It is not something to be appropriated along with large white plates by the aspiring and upwardly mobile. Food is a cultural and a social issue. Lack of awareness about food in our society reinforces the low value of domestic labour. It also encourages the proliferation of ‘fast food’ outlets which are conquering the taste-buds of a generation of workers’ children. In contrast, Italy prefers to wait for the seasons, to respect its materials and produce natural eating. Here are culinary and political lessons to be learnt.

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The view from the community sector
cont. from page 17

blinking evangelists.

No rational person doubts the need to vastly increase our skill base, or doubts that the labour market for unskilled workers has gone for good. Education and training is the answer; and education and training which is more flexible and responsive to consumers’ needs. But on whose terms? The view that it must be hitched onto high value added industry is simply wrong. At the bottom line, as in Sweden, employment in these areas will continue to fall.

But the government has another goal here. It is to use training to replace the social security safety net, currently sagging under the weight of the extra 10% of the work-age population no longer supported within families, with a springboard to work. However, the additional time spent in training only reduces the demand for extra jobs slightly; so where are these jobs to come from? The answer is in the missing chapter — like Sweden it is in the public sector and the broad community services industry. Even more important, how are the very special disadvantages and needs of these potential workers to be met?

Australia Reconstructed is sensitive to this problem. Indeed, in this section it specifically expands the definition of tripartism to include “education and training institutions and community and social welfare groups”. The present steam rolling with both its union and government drivers, simply hasn’t understood the point.

But the document may be useful for the community sector for precisely this reason. Put bluntly, the union movement doesn’t yet recognise that all its talk of full employment, of income (including social wage) distribution, of participation, skill enhancement, and an integrated approach to planning, founders on a serious lack of understanding of the problems of distribution and the role of the public and service sectors in this. But this very demonstrable weakness in a necessarily integrated package — one which calls for common objective — gives the community sector the best opening for an educative dialogue with the union movement that has ever appeared.

Perhaps this is the real opportunity offered by the document for the public and service sectors — a chance for a deeper integration of the goals of the different progressive social forces; so that, when we do win a measure of the control Australia Reconstructed promises, we will be a bit clearer about where we are headed.

Adam Farrar.

ALR Price Increase

As you will have noticed, the cover price of ALR has risen from this issue. Subscription rates will also rise from February 1 as indicated on the contents page, except for renewals forwarded on the red slip enclosed with expired subscriptions; or subscriptions taken out under the special offer advertised elsewhere in this issue. Our last price rise was at the beginning of 1986: the present rise has been necessitated by sharply rising production costs over the intervening period.

LETTERS

• We welcome your letters for our next issue. As a general rule, letters should be no longer than 300 words and, preferably, should be typewritten. ALR reserves the right to edit letters down to this length.

• authors’ addresses and a contact phone number should be included, although, naturally, they will not be printed. The deadline for letters is four weeks prior to the month of publication.
After Ron and Mikhail


Reviewed by Dave Worth.

Both of these books are about ANZUS: in particular, about the separate but similar relationship of Australia and New Zealand to the Tammany Hall mayor of the western alliance — the USA. The central difference between the two books is that McMillan narrows his focus to the nuclear ships issue while Suter paints a broader picture of ANZUS's value in relation to Australia's security.

The significance of these two books has been enhanced now that the USA and the USSR have signed the INF Treaty. With plans under way to draft a new treaty to lower the superpowers' strategic nuclear arsenals by 50% or more, the historical value of McMillan's book and the forward-looking nature of Suter's make them a thought-provoking, and hence valuable, read.

The strength and enthusiasm of the Australian peace movement has been on the slide since the middle of 1986. The printed media's coverage of the events around the signing of the INF Treaty gives an indication of what is to come. Unless the peace movement is more outspoken, or publishes more books such as McMillan's, then the writers of today's history will project a distorted image. They will record the role played by Reagan and Gorbachev in establishing a new relationship between the USA and the USSR, but not the more vital part played by the millions of ordinary people around the world who participated in thousands of peace organisations.

Readers in the future should understand that these were the people who created the political climate that allowed the two leaders successfully to complete an about-turn that would have been thought unbelievable less than two years ago.

While Keith Suter has long participated actively in the Australian peace movement, Stuart McMillan is a specialist writer on international and strategic affairs for Christchurch's morning paper. What makes his detailed description of the banning of nuclear warships from New Zealand by the Lange government stand out is that he obviously has contacts both within the NZ Labour Party and the US Embassy.

He has written a balanced book in that he has outlined the positions taken by all of the protagonists and tried to describe why they hold them. In a very indirect and English way, he makes it clear that those parties which don't come out of this affair in a good light are the distant US Administration (especially some sections in the State Department) and to a lesser extent, the Australian government.

Australia gets good marks for the way that it handled the conflict between its two ANZUS partners (alliance management, it's called). It helped salvage its alliance with the US but undermined its more important relations with its near neighbour, New Zealand.

The supreme irony in reading this story is that now the INF Treaty allows Russian inspectors onto American soil and that of its allies (West Germany and the UK) to confirm that nuclear weapons are not being stored there. However, the US still refuses publicly to "confirm or deny" to its allies the presence of nuclear weapons on its warships which regularly enter our harbours.

Keith Suter's small but powerful book is necessary reading for anyone interested in the Australian peace movement and questions of sovereignty. He clearly outlines the background to the ANZUS Treaty and its interpretation by various political groupings. And his writing is couched in terms that help cut through the confusion in the debate over ANZUS and national security.

He looks at whether ANZUS, our relationship to the US and the military equipment we are buying are adding to, or reducing, our national security. A whole chapter looks at what few threats to Australia have been identified by different private and government reports.

It is most appropriate that Senator Jo Vallentine provides the foreword.
as she has spent a major part of her time in parliament raising the issue of a 'just' defence for Australia. In a similar vein, Suter spends the last quarter of his book focusing on the 'just' defence issue. He sees many positive challenges raised by the Dibb report in particular.

Some of the suggestions he makes to peace activists are not going to please some of us. For example, he must still be the only person in Australia who believes that all of the US bases in Australia can be internationalised. On the other hand he argues that even though Australia is one of the most secure nations on earth, most of the general public don't believe this. Further, most politicians from the major parties are not willing to be outfront on this issue and state the obvious — that ANZUS is an empty treaty.

Thus his comprehensive political strategy is based on the premise that 'there is little to be gained by attaching or calling directly for the ending of ANZUS, or by the advocacy of 'armed neutrality'. He believes that "It is first necessary to deal with (person's) fears and then to look at the inadequacy of the 'safety blanket'."

It is certain that there will still be plenty to keep peace activists busy in the next few decades — even if we do see a major new treaty on strategic weapons. Both of these books provide something to help us to go about this task enthusiastically. Stuart McMillan's book provides detail not given in our papers on an important government disarmament initiative. It provides, in particular, information about the different political forces at work in such a difficult situation.

Keith Suter provides some real questions about the priority of the work undertaken by the Australian peace movement. He encourages it to understand more fully the social conditions within which we work, and finishes by suggesting a ten-point action plan that is aimed at what he sees as the peace movement's main task: working for multilateral disarmament and enhancing Australia's national security.

DAVE WORTH works at the Ideas Centre in Sydney and has been active in the peace movement for the last ten years.

**Quite Kosher**


Simon Blumenfeld's *Jew Boy* first appeared in 1935 and reappears now in a facsimile edition. As Blumenfeld's first novel, it was influential in its time and made it possible for other Jewish writers to have their work published. Most immediately, it is a response to the British capital.

The London of the 1930s is powerfully evoked — a city of contrasts, rich and poor, decadent and austere, a modern day Sodom and Gomorrah with its "amusement parlours, and stream-lined cars and eight-storey factories". Alec, the central character, is a young Jewish tailor living in the Jewish East End. He belongs to the small, unique community of cafes, libraries, billiard halls, political and musical organisations and education classes which existed between the two world wars.

Simon Blumenfeld and numerous other Jewish writers have acknowledged the inspiration — both political and creative — of this subculture. Alec, too, is a regular at the informal gatherings at Whitechapel Library and the Workers' Circle. They provide him with an ideological perspective on his days at 'the lousy workshop' where he is subject to unrewarding work (both spiritually and financially) and a repressive managerial structure. *Jew Boy* provides unforgettable images of 'the dark, blind, overpowering maw of hard labour'.

The entire novel is seen through Alec's eyes. It traces his 'Odyssey, a painful search for a way of living'. This involves a search for comprehensive social meanings — finally resulting in his decision to join the Communist Party and agitate ('his place was in the ranks'). All aspects of Alec's life come together under a discriminating materialist analysis: the dance-halls he visits, the fac'ory, the filthy East End slums' and the wider world he looks out upon.

Everything linked up with economics; even in dance-halls, these swan songs of a decaying civilisation... bread-line songs, steadily getting more and more doleful. Trade is bad, exports have gone to hell, and we're all bankrupt, but there's nothing we can do about it, so let's dance, and cry our eyes out!

*Jew Boy* confronts ethnic and class discrimination, the exploitative conditions in the labour market, 'the disease of Unemployment', the sheer struggle of the working class to survive, and the social demands on young Jewish people to marry early. It's full of hard luck stories, of people with no exit, trapped by vicious circumstances. Women like Olive,
who Alec eventually sets up house with, are forced into prostitution. Workers' protests result in retrenchment slips in the pay packets. There is no solution to the immediate problems each character faces; the answer the book argues, lies only in wide-scale structural changes. It is Alec's consistent and impassioned argument that the workers are 'the producers of wealth, the rightful owners of the earth'.

While Jew Boy strongly asserts the existence of a unique Jewish ethnicity, it sees the position of Jews within the wider capitalist framework. Alec meets Jo-Jo, a black American and communist agitator who has travelled widely. He voices a view Alec has arrived at long before: "We ain't jest Jews, and jest Negroes, we's workers too. We got to know all dese t'ings an' stick to our class at de same time". Alec rejects the theory of Palestine as the true homeland of the Jews:

As a worker, I won't be any better off in Palestine, maybe worse. I don't see why I should change one set of exploiters for another because they happen to be Jewish.

Alec develops his political beliefs as a result of harsh circumstances over which he had no control: "he worked hard, earned profits for the boss, got fired, and had to stand in bread lines". He watches with dread as the world careers towards fascism and war. Much of his time is spent longing for companionship, sexual fulfilment — and, inevitably, escape.

Despite the miseries of Alec's life, Jew Boy maintains a surprising vitality — largely due to the underlying visionary socialism. From the perspective of the '80s, the book is interesting as a precursor to today's literature of dissent. As Ken Worpole puts it in his introduction, "possibly the most affirmative writing today is being produced as a result of other cultural imperatives, particularly those of feminism and the struggle for identity in the more recent immigrant communities".

Affirmations of a meaningful ethnic identity abound, though, in this text which undermines the image of Jews as cold, self-seeking financiers: "these turbulent excitable people ... had life and colour". The novel ends with Alec's bold assertions of the need to fight for ethnic and class unity — and revolution. In some ways, reading Jew Boy reminded me of listening to a '30s blues jazz piece where hope (and commitment) lie just beyond the despair.

MATTHEW HARDING is book reviewer for Sydney radio 2SER's "Sunday Arts" program.

Atta Girl


Madonna may indeed be, in the words of the Sydney Morning Herald's reviewer, the "first star to have created herself entirely from her feminine predecessors — not just a few, but a whole album-full". She may well also be just about the worst actress in screen history, if Who's That Girl is any guide. But she's a bona fide cultural phenomenon, of that there's no doubt. And that, oddly, is what makes her clumsy, mis-paced presence in this good-tempered reborn 'fifties comedy such a perversely entertaining experience.

After all, the whole "dizzy blonde" cliche from the heyday of this genre was essentially a gesture towards the Otherness of the screen Woman — it made her acted upon rather than acting, a spectacle rather than a character. And Who's That Girl does try that line. At one point, the frazzled male lead, Young Lawyer Loudon Trott (Griffith Dunne) exclaims that, no, he can't do that — after all, he's only a man, not
an elemental "force of nature" like her. (Press those feminist alarm bells ...)

But the idea of this hyper-active, aerobicised role-model somehow playing "dizzy blonde" (is it really Marilyn Monroe she's supposed to be aping with that pout?) is clearly absurd — and Madonna makes sure that it is by never letting even one of those tell-tale "vulnerable" moments become remotely plausible. So, as bad acting goes, it's almost subversive.

Unlike the 'fifties heroines/victims, her "scattiness" is never allowed to become an object of ridicule or scorn — and this reviewer, at least, found that a relief. It may be a small tribute to the filmmaker, but is certainly a larger one to Madonna's own innate role-modelling good sense. After all, with the eyes of several million tough-nut teenage girls on your every confident move, how could you melt ...

In other respects, too, Who's That Girl is a sign of the times. We're by now well used to '80s Hollywood and its knack of reworking the cliches of bygone eras in ways that should really have had the post-modernists reaching for their word-processors. From Star Wars and Superman onwards, the last decade seems to have been a veritable carnival of genres turned topsy-turvy in search of contemporariness. Who, for instance, really expects us to take the plot-line of La Bamba seriously?

Poor boy made good, Latino boy meets nice white girl, mother and son, brother and brother — it's got every cliche known to film, almost as if the writer were ticking them off on his or her list. But here, as in most mainstream art forms down through history, it's not even evading the cliches, but what you do with them, that counts.

And, apart from the 'fifties references (and here Bringing Up Baby is the model, as the Herald critic noted), Who's That Girl is a treasure trove of other genres and cliches. For a start, it's part of the sub-genre yuppie boy meets street life downtown (or downtown girl): in this case, it's the appropriately awful soon-to-be-married Loudon Trott, who's supposed to be taking our newly-released crim Madonna safely to the bus station and out of town. Of course, from there everything goes wrong, and everything turns on its head — from graffitied Rolls Royces to the spectacle of Madonna masquerading as the very proper bride-to-be to a brace of stockbrokers.

And, as in comedy it should be, the message is appropriately popular, in the best sense of the word: the pomposity of the wealthy and notable gets a bucketting; the street kid wins out; and of course an appropriately incredible love-match wins out, too, in the end. If there's nothing new in Who's That Girl, there's certainly nothing which should give any halfway good-humoured left cause for heartburn. It does give a funny kind of uplift, and it has more than a few genuine comic moments. It's definitely not great filmmaking, but there are a lot worse things the kids could be doing over the holiday season.

DAVID BURCHELL co-ordinates ALR.

The Future For The Left

by Jade Bull

Jade has been inundated both by sincere, sharing supply-side socialists (probably with large share portfolios) and badly alienated unbelieving leftists, all claiming that I mispredicted the Wall Street crash (see ALR 102). My only response is: "stay liquid — you ain't seen nothing yet".

As far as Jade is concerned the fireworks won't come from the Bicentennial, they will come from the Saturn/Uranus/Neptune conjunction. For the astrologically illiterate, this is a cosmic event bigger than the late lamented Laurie Brereton's vision.

A year of turmoil lies ahead, comrades: through the mosaic of Bicentennial bliss, perspiring pliticians, bleeding blacks, stampeding stockbrokers, a new party of the left or the left-overs of a new party, one thing is clear — '88 will not be for the faint hearted.

So take a little advice from Jade — here are your prospects for '88.

PLANETARY influences on your chart
mean that you will spend much of 1988 feeling that the numbers are against you. Don’t get paranoid, they are. 1988 just isn’t going to be a good year for you — best just to put it down to experience. In case you hadn’t noticed, 1987 was your year: if you didn’t get your politics, love-life and finance together then, Jupiter (the cash-flow planet) isn’t due to smile on you in particular for another 11 years.

Lucky number — I must be honest, your guess is as good as mine. Lucky colour — whatever matches your eyes.

TAURUS
April 21-May 21

GOLLY! This is going to be a great year. Had your eye on the Branch President’s position? You won’t get a better chance for a long, long time. Finances and fortunes are favourable with Jupiter moving into your sign, maybe you will win the collected works of Kim II-Sung at the Xmas Dinner. You will find that dedicated readers of this column will like you more in 1988.

Lucky number — Any: fate’s: on your side.
Lucky colour — We suggest you stick with red.

GEMINI
May 22-June 21

After many years of trials and testings, your development is reaching a crucial juncture. Unfortunately, the influences of Neptune in Capricorn and the Bicentennial will give you a powerful urge to cop out. If you do you will probably be hit by a bus. Your tendency to periods of manic hyperactivity, unless curtailed, could lead to domestic disharmony and new travel opportunities (albeit to an adjoining suburb).

Lucky number — 2 (of course).
Lucky colour — Green (Jade’s green ’79 model Gemini has always been reliable).

CANCER
June 22-July 22

Since late 1987 Uranus has been forming in your sixth house (the house of health and habits). Unexpected health related matters could make Cancerians retreat into their shells. This is probably a good thing: everyone knows that Cancers flourish in the Australian summer.

Lucky number — You don’t believe in this rubbish.
Lucky colour — ditto.

LEO
July 23-August 23

Over recent years you may have felt uncertain or uncomfortable with your personal environment due to Pluto’s slow transit of your fourth solar house. Though the Plutonian need to probe and reassess this area of your life continues, your attention should begin to turn to your potential for leadership. Consensus politics offers no opportunities for you. With your constellation in consternation, the ultra-left calls.

Lucky number — 50% + 1
Lucky colour — anything but green.

VIRGO
August 24-September 23

Amid the turmoil of ’88, the ebb and flow of planetary influences should be gentle for most Virgos. Don’t be concerned about your desire to withdraw from political activities: nobody really appreciates you, anyway.

Lucky number — N/A
Lucky colour — ditto.

LIBRA
September 24-October 23

You saw ’87 as the end of your indecisiveness: now you are not so sure. 1988 should be a great year to remember for romance and personal achievement, but is that what you really want? Unfortunately, that’s your decision. It’s not written in the stars, you know.

Lucky number — 4
Lucky colour — Blue.

SCORPIO
October 24-November 22

With Pluto in Scorpio you are having a really good time seeking to “find yourself” (a bit self-indulgent, don’t you think?) ’88 promises more of your favourite pastimes — smut, dirt, mystery and intrigue. Not only that — you will probably enjoy it. If you want to clean up your game, hang around with Virgos.

Lucky number — more the merrier
Lucky colour — black.

SAGITTARIUS
November 23-December 21

With Saturn and Uranus transiting through your house you are to experience a year that might be likened to a “cosmic bowel movement”. Stay on your guard and be prepared to expel all that is useless in your life. Watch that deficit spending — Saturn is the ruler of the balanced budget.

Lucky number — 13
Lucky colour — brown.

CAPRICORN
December 22-January 20

If you think Sagittarians have got something to think about you’ve got it even more so (see Sag.). Fortunately, Saturn is more comfortable in Capricorn so you will probably have the movement without the mess.

Lucky number — as above
Lucky colour — ditto.

AQUARIUS
January 21-February 19

Caught in the wake of the Sagittarian and Capricorn eruptions, the wise Aquarian will go to bed with a good book and ALR. See you in ’89.

Lucky number — not necessary
Lucky colour — ditto.

PISCES
February 20-March 20

The transiting Neptune, sextet to Pisces, makes you particularly susceptible to tall ships and national chauvinism. Your failure to resist these urges will leave you like a fish out of water. Remember, others on the left will not be as impressed with your Bicentennial convict barbecue apron as you are.

Lucky number — 88
Lucky colour — green and yellow.
ALR's guide

to what's oh,
where to
see it,
where to
eat,
where to
buy it...

and jazz artists, as well as big bands, comedians, exhibitions, music workshops, industry seminars, hi fi and record fairs, and more. Drawcards include John Farnham, Icehouse, Jimmy Barnes, The Angels and The Hoodoo Gurus.

The Sydney Morning Herald thought it 'one of the freshest, most intelligent films of the year'. The Face thought it would have Joe Orton 'wanking in his grave'. Whatever your verdict, the film version of Prick Up Your Ears, the playwright's biography, has been packing them in in Sydney and Melbourne. And the denouement may persuade you never to steal an idea again. Prick Up Your Ears is showing in Sydney at the Roma, George St, City and the Academy Twin, Oxford St, Paddington; and in Melbourne at the Longford Cinema, South Yarra and the Capitol, Swanston St, City. But have dinner after the movie.

If you like seeing white people with shoe polish on their faces, Dancing In The Street: The Motown Story, may be for you. One of a rash of Motown revival items in the last few years, it's directed by Graeme Blundell, and written by Bob Hudson (who should really know better). It's showing at Kinselas in Sydney from January; tickets are $15 from the usual outlets.

Shiatsu Acupuncture Therapy. Basement 12 McKillop St, Melbourne. Mon-Fri 11-7. $18 a session. It's more than a Japanese massage. Based on manipulating and massaging various bodily 'pressure points' like acupuncture minus the needles. Phone for appointments (03) 670 1266.

LC

If you've ever wondered at the inability of men to leave the toilet seat down, Born To Clean may come as a revelation. The play, by NZ playwright Renee, stars three Amandas in a celebration of triumph over the domestic drudgery of floor polish and toilet ducks. "Gonna make my kitchen shine for Jesus!" sings one of the Amandas in a rhapsodic moment: don't miss it. Born To Clean is playing at the Belvoir St in Sydney until Jan 31.

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Melbourne Comedy Festival. A Myriad of events at numerous venues through most of March. Let's hope the second repeats the success of the first festival, so that Melbourne's title of Comedy Capital of Australia will remain undisputed. All of Australia's funny people will be in town for an orgy of laughs. Watch the media for details.

Two thirds of the wine drunk by Australians is white, but more than three quarters comes from casks. And in fact quality bottled whites — particularly Chardonnays and the newly fashionable Sauvignon (aka Fume) Blanc — do seem expensive. What's more, given the popularity of Asian and Indian cuisines, a lot of white wine bought for going out can be a waste. Often all that can be tasted for those hard earned dollars is a dull wash.

The solutions to these dilemmas aren't, however, too far to seek. With spicy or Asian cuisines (except for seafoods), give the classy dry whites a miss and try a medium sweet or even sweetish style — traminer or traminer Riesling choice is The San Francisco Examiner waxed lyrical: 'Astonishing, ethereal, enthralling, unexpected and bizarre — Circus Oz defies gravity'. Circus Oz are on their tenth anniversary world tour, and if you've never seen them this may be the time. They're jumping, rolling and bouncing at Wentworth Park, Glebe, from early January: tickets are $18, $12 concession, $8.50 for kids and $44.60 for families.

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